



**Widening Access to Refugees:
Responses of Austrian Public Universities**

by

IŞIL GÜNEY

Master's Thesis for the completion of
the Erasmus Mundus program, Master in
Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE)

Thesis supervisor: Dr. Habil. Attila PAUSITS

Department for Continuing Education Research and Educational Management, Danube
University, Krems

ABSTRACT

Europe has been a scene of mass migration unparalleled in scale since the World War II in the last couple of years. With the recent migration flow, higher education institutions have confronted with the new challenge of managing a diverse student body from refugees and asylum seekers. Likewise, refugee and asylum seeking students have encountered various barriers in accessing higher education. Whilst significance of higher education for refugees is well-documented in the literature, higher education has not been prioritized for international support and education of refugees has received little attention until recently.

Being one of the main transit countries for refugees, Austria has received approximately 90.000 asylum applications in 2015, an increase of 200% as compared to 2014, which is equivalent to about 1 percent of country's population. While policy discussions in Austria have revolved around handling the refugee crisis and offering humanitarian aid, the role of higher education in integrating refugees has not yet been considered by the policy side. In this context, the aim of this study is to analyze how the Austrian higher education system is responding to including refugees and asylum seekers and what policies and strategies they are adopting to this end. The study adopts qualitative methodology, and employs documentary research and interviews as data collection tools. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews from various stakeholders representing Austrian higher education system; universities, students, student unions and analysis of the official documents "*Leistungsvereinbarung*" (performance agreements) of public universities.

Findings reveal that language, funding and lack of documentation constitute major obstacles for refugee students' access to higher education. While efforts are being exerted by individual universities and NGOs to meet immediate challenges, funding and support from the policy side of higher education remain scarce. Thus, a concerted national action plan for education of refugees is needed.

Keywords: Austria, higher education, refugees, widening access, participation

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FOREWORD

First and foremost, my deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor Dr. Habil. Attila Pausits for his relentless patience, support, comfort and confidence in me during this journey. I have always felt fortunate that my ideas and interests were respected by my supervisor and I had the freedom to pursue what I want. My heartfelt thanks are for reassuring and guiding me during all those times when I felt stumbling and disheartened about the direction of my research. Finally, many thanks for your tolerance, understanding and facilitating my life when I was trying to balance my health and studies.

My special thanks go to our professors in the MARIHE program; Jussi Kivistö, Yuzhuo Cai, Lauren Misiaszek, and Danhui Zhang, and finally to Prof. Hamish Coates for his guidance and insightful comments right at the beginning of my thesis research.

I am thankful to my supervisor, Ms. Astrid Kurzmann, Mag. Elisabeth Westphal, Dr. Mustafa Haidar and Alexander Edelmann for helping me reach out to contacts. I would like to thank all my participants for taking their time to contribute to my research, for their valuable opinions and insights into the study.

My dear MARIHE friends, this journey would be impossible without your genuine friendship, love and support.

Finally, my thanks go to the European Commission for this scholarship and opportunity to pursue my dreams, and for touching people's lives from all corners of the world through these programs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMS	Labour Market Service, Public Employment Office
BMFWF	Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENIC	European Network of Information Centers in the European Region
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IC	Interviewee Code
LLL	Lifelong Learning
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centers in the European Union
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OEAD	The Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research
OIF	Austrian Integration Fund
RFQ	Recognition of Foreign Qualifications
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
UNIKO	Universities Austria
WP	Widening Participation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the thesis and provides an overview of the thesis topic. Providing some background information on the research topic, it identifies the research problem and addresses the gap in the literature. The focus of the research is stated and the overall research aim and research objectives are identified. Then the research question and significance of the issue are presented. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis and informing about individual chapters.

1.1 Background

The year 2015 marked a turning point in migration history of world as violence, persecution, war, poverty, climate change and natural disasters drove millions of people away from their homes and generated prolonged displacements. The UN figures (United Nations, 2016) indicate that the number of international migrants have surged substantially in the last two decades from 173 million in 2000 up to 244 million in 2015. Refugees constituted a significant part of this mass exodus of people. The total number of refugees in 2014 was predicted to be 19.5 million worldwide whereas the number of internally displaced people mounted up to 38,2 million. Figures demonstrate that more than half of all refugees hailed from the following countries: the Syrian Arabic Republic (3.9 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million) and Somalia (1.1 million). Triggered by the war in Syria, central Africa and South Sudan, the number of refugees surpassed 50 million for the first the time since the World War II (p. 1-9)

Accordingly, over a million migrants and refugees crossed borders into Europe in the last few years, which sparked a migration crisis unprecedented in scale in Europe since 1950s. In 2015, the number of first time asylum seekers (1.255.600 people) who applied for international protection in the EU Member states doubled as compared to the previous year. Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi first time asylum applicants constituted more than half of all applicants. In 2015, the highest numbers of first time applicants in EU was recorded respectively in Germany (with 441.800 first time applicants, equal to 35% of all first time applicants in the EU Member States), Hungary (174.400, or 14%), Sweden (156.100, or 12%), Austria (85.500, or 7%), Italy (83.200, or 7%) and

France (70. 600, or 6%). When compared to figures from 2014, the number of first time asylum applicants increased by +822 % in Finland, + 323% in Hungary, + 233% in Austria, + 178% in Belgium, +167 % in Spain and + 155 % in Germany (Eurostat, 2016, p. 1).

Having caught unprepared for large streams of migration, Europe has had to tackle with an array of policy issues ranging from humanitarian aid, border control, human trafficking, integration, education, European neighborhood policy, disputes between member countries on EU common law relating to asylum, borders and immigration and so on. While immigration in the long-term is estimated to yield positive results for Europe to reverse its declining population, recovering its economy and sustaining its welfare system, integration of hundreds of thousands of refugees into their host societies remain an arduous task (Techau, 2015). Given the various motives behind migration particularly in cases of ongoing wars, it seems unlikely that there will be a reverse migration to countries of origin in the short run.

As the primary concern of hosting countries has been humanitarian aid related to food, shelter, and health in this process, it has taken a while to realize that due to displacement, refugee youth miss out on higher education (HE). In their article in University World News titled “*The Syrian refugee crisis – What can universities do?*”, Altbach and de Wit (2015) called on higher education institutions (HEIs) to respond to the needs of refugee students and opened up discussions for the role that HEIs could play in responding to the crisis and integration of refugees along with challenges they face in accessing HE. Analyzing the current situation from the perspective of human capital, they highlight the potential of refugees in knowledge economy and benefits HEIs could derive from widening access to refugee students. Recognizing the both immediate and long-term challenges ahead, the authors draw attention to the fact that integration of refugees could yield positive results for integration of refugees, internationalizing the campus and social engagement of academic communities.

Many other benefits of HE for refugees are well-documented in the literature. Firstly, HE acts as an instrument of recovery and reconstruction. It assists in formation of necessary intellectual and social capital for rebuilding politics, society and economy of the war-stricken countries and hence, contribute to post-war transformation of the home country (Dryden-Peterson, 2012; Milton & Barakat 2015).

HE can play a role in domestic politics of the countries. Refugees may, as in the case of Germany, be considered as an opportunity to reverse demographic decline and sustain sustainable

social welfare system in the long-run (Cremonini, 2016). Higher education could equip refugees with skills required to find a job in the labour market and help them lead a dignified life.

Secondly, HE contributes to resilience and well-being of refugees (Crea, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2012). Long-term displacement drains economic, social, family and individual resources available to refugees and results in mental stress (Horn as cited in Crea, 2016, p.13). Research indicates connection between education and improved mental health (Mitschke et al., 2013) and better quality of life (Crondahl & Eklund, 2012).

Thirdly, HE provides a form of protection for young men and women from violence and fundamentalism. Providing refugees with future orientation can reduce the likelihood of them engaging in extreme political and ethnic ideologies or terrorism (Milton & Barakat 2015; Anselme and Hands, 2010; Hart, 2008; Crea, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2012). In this context, Cremonini (2016) underscores importance of civic integration of refugees in their hosting countries and argues that higher education is key to ensuring integration of refugees.

Along with the call to academic community and universities, widening access to refugees has started to be more commonly discussed in the context of EHEA and social dimension of Bologna process as it is closely linked with the overall goals of the latter. Yet, increased participation of underrepresented groups still remains a challenge for the Bologna process. As noted in a report by the Committee on Culture of the European Commission, (Łybacka, 2015);

Despite the commitment to set measurable goals for expanding overall participation in higher education and increasing the access of underrepresented groups, less than 20 % of educational systems have defined quantitative objectives with regards to underrepresented groups. Improving social inclusion and enhancing equal opportunities for access, as well as international mobility for under-represented and disadvantaged groups remains a challenge for the Bologna Process. While working on raising the number of students in higher education, improving completion rates must be addressed (p. 11-12).

In this context, the focus of this thesis is refugees who constitute just one segment of these underrepresented groups and their access to HE. Given the vast bulk of literature dealing with immigration and integration, the thesis probes into access of refugees into HE within the context

of Austrian HE and responses of public universities in their efforts to integrate them into their systems.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the last couple of decades, coupled with the increasing number of refugees seeking access to HE, issues of diversity and widening access have moved from periphery into mainstream discussions in the field of HE. The recent migration flow into Europe has posed new challenges for both HEIs which have been striving to accommodate a diverse body of refugee and asylum seeking students. Similarly, refugee and asylum seekers face various impediments in accessing HE such as lack of appropriate documentation, guidance, information or counselling, inadequate language training, or financial constraints. Having been the third country that has received the most asylum applications in Europe, Austria has tried both to reconcile between handling the refugee crisis and political debates that come along with it. The Universities Austria (UNIKO) launched an initiative called MORE solely targeting refugee students in September 2015 with participation of 19 public universities for humanitarian aid, fundraising, language courses and integration based on their infrastructure and capabilities. Yet, practices of some universities within the MORE program were questioned by the right-wing party through parliamentary questions of which votes and popularity surged after the crisis. Amidst the political debates on the refugee crisis, universities exerted varying degrees of efforts for facilitation of access of refugees.

Getting the universities to address the underrepresented groups is a challenging task both in Austria and elsewhere. Austria has an open access policy concerning HE. Most often, the open access system based on the secondary school leaving certificate is likely to be considered as widening participation (WP); however, an open access system does not always lead to WP, if the retention rates are low. As Schmidt&Sursock (2011) asserted it, it is usually not typical in such systems to track students through their life-cycle and without support open access does not become an opportunity for students (p 20-21). As Ferrier remarked (2010) “Higher education institutions that recruit a more diverse student group but do not meet these students’ learning and support needs fail themselves and their students. They will not be able to sustain diversity, and will miss out on the benefits it has to offer. Student retention will be affected” (as cited in Schmidt&Sursock, 2011, p. 21).

1.3 Research Objective and Research Question

The overall aim of this research is to expand an understanding of how a national HE system in Europe responds to including refugees with emphasis on recent developments upon the case of emergency pursuant to an unexpected mass migration. In the first place, understanding how the system adapts itself to the emergent situation entails gaining insight into the context- how at European, national and institutional level the issue is addressed and if specific policies, strategies or approaches are adopted to this end. This in turn would enable one to see how Austrian universities position themselves in terms of engagement to refugees' access. Secondly, it would be difficult to comprehend how HEIs should meet challenges of refugees' access to HE without identifying potential barriers faced by both refugees and institutions per se. Further, the research will present views and opinions of different stakeholders. Finally, it formulates suggestions and recommendations derived from interviews as well as literature and practices of other countries.

Thus, the objectives of this research are to:

- (a) identify the challenges against refugee students' access to HE
- (b) evaluate critically national and institutional policies relevant to facilitation of refugee students' access to HE
- (c) explore stakeholder views and practices related to refugees' access to HE
- (d) formulate recommendations on facilitation of refugee higher education

The research question of the thesis is: "How do public universities in Austria respond to including asylum seekers/refugees to higher education?"

Sub-questions

- How do universities position themselves in terms of including asylum seekers/refugees?
- What policies and practical strategies do universities employ to adapt themselves to include refugees/asylum seekers?
- What kind of approaches do universities adopt to include refugees and asylum seekers?
- What obstacles do they face in achieving this objective?

1.4 Research Gap

Migration is well-researched in Austria. As put by Kraler (2005) in her literature review about immigration research in Austria, the most commonly researched fields fall under themes of citizenship policy, asylum policy, employment policy, non-nationals or anti-discrimination policy (p.3). Recently, another considerable body of literature has been devoted to the legal framework for integration of migrants as well as political integration with changing discourse from migration policy to integration in Austria (Kraler, 2005, p.11). The project *Migration and Integration Research Database* conducted by the Commission for Migration and Integration Research (KMI) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (ÖAW) in 2012 aimed at creating a database on migration and integration research in which research reports, theses, doctoral theses, habilitations, publications in total 3.131 titles covering 1,060 articles in books, 853 theses, 602 journal articles, 243 books, 198 research reports and 136 edited books on the issue between 2000-2011 were brought together and categorized (p. 6-11). The project reveals that in terms of content, majority of studies focus on law (1.112 titles), followed by politics (534), education (417), work and occupation (395), and data and description (395). The remaining studies focus on language (378), social (359), and health (305). In terms of the target group in the studies, people with migration background rank the first with 247 titles, followed by foreign citizens (56) and workers (45) (Sievers, 2012, p. 6-12).

Education in its relation to migration has been well-studied as well. Almost half of the literature in the field of education focused on school education (216 titles) whereas the rest were respectively on kindergarten (33) university (16), and continuing education (15). While the most commonly addressed issue is language in the field of education with 160 titles, there are 5 studies on language in HE and 4 on multilingualism (Sievers, 2012, p.19). Whilst there are no specific studies on refugees and asylum seeking students' access to HE, there are studies on access of people with migrant-background to education or HE (Pásztor, 2016; Schnell, 2014; Berger, 1974) or integration of foreign students into Austrian universities (Gehrke, 2008).

Concerning the research on refugee and asylum seekers, integration of refugees is reported to have been under-researched in Austria. While existing research on integration targets migrants, asylum seekers and refugees receive less attention mostly being considered as objects of analysis within the group of migrants or third country nationals (UNHCR, 2013, p.26).

1.5 Definition of Key Words

The following definitions are provided for understanding of these terms throughout the study. In this study *widening access* refers to increasing the number of students from under-represented groups and ensuring that this participation leads to successful completion (Council of Europe, 1998, p.21). *Widening participation* is most often used interchangeably with *widening access* to refer to increasing the proportion of students from under-represented groups entering and completing higher education (Kooij, 2015, p.70).

Refugee means a third country national who due to fear of being persecuted for religion, race, nationality, political reasons or membership of a particular social group is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin. *Refugee status* refers to recognition of a third country national or a stateless person as a refugee by a European Member state (Council Directive, 2011, Article 2).

Asylum seekers are defined as “applicants for international protection”. Asylum seeker is a person who seeks protection as a refugee, but whose claim for refugee status has not yet finally been decided. Not every asylum seeker is necessarily recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker (UNHCR, nd).

1.6 Significance of the Study

The current study hopes to contribute both to the existing scholarship and policy-making. The study’s contribution to the literature is expected to be threefold. Firstly, although migration, asylum and integration are well-researched within the Austrian context, refugees and asylum seeker students have not been studied within the context of widening access or discipline of higher education. Secondly, as the refugee crisis is recent, there are almost no studies available addressing the issues surrounding access of refugee students to HE across Europe. In this regard, the study offers a conceptual framework for analysis of refugee students integration into HE. Thirdly, the current study sketches out the initial response of a national HE system for widening access to

refugee students and hence, prepares the ground for further studies and comparisons. Finally, it aims to instigate further research on the role of HE in emergencies. Bringing together these under-researched areas, it is hoped that the study will contribute to literature of HE from the perspective of widening access as well as refugee studies by presenting challenges impeding refugee students' access to HE in Austrian context.

As the study sheds light on the current responses of Austrian universities' to refugee students, it expects to inform policy-makers on the existing situation in Austria, enables them to have an insight into European level practices, and offers recommendations at national and institutional levels. Reflecting views of various stakeholders representing Austrian HE system, it attempts to analyze the refugee issue through the lenses of ministry, universities and students.

1.7 Organization of the Study

The thesis is organized into five chapters. The first chapter *Introduction* provides background information regarding the problem, states the focus of the study and explains the rationale why the study is being pursued. The second chapter *Conceptual Framework* covers the review of related theoretical literature, previous researches and concepts that support and inform the research. The research methodology, sample selection and procedures used to gather data are explained in the third chapter *Methodology*. The results of the analyses and findings will be explained in the fourth chapter *Data Analysis*. Finally, in the fifth chapter of *Conclusion& Discussion*, a summary of the study and the findings, conclusions drawn from the research, and discussion will be presented.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter reviews the theoretical literature that underlies the study. Three main bodies of literature underpinning the conceptual framework are presented. Concepts and theories from sociology of education, literature on widening access and studies on refugees are reviewed and intertwined to provide the background for the conceptual framework.

2.1 Theoretical Overview

This section presents an overview of some major bodies of theories and approaches related to the issue of access and equity across the field of sociology of education. Up until the 1960s, the field was dominated by the *functionalist* approach in which education assumes significant functions in modernization and development of a society by providing the equity of opportunity for all citizens. Parsons (1959) asserts that education espouses values of competition, achievement, equality and individualism in young people and thus helps sustain society. Analyzing the societies from agrarian to modern continuum, they assert that the idea of meritocracy prevails in the modern societies and education becomes key in meritocratic selection process (as cited in Sadovnik, 2007, p.5). Meritocracy refers to a social system in which success or achievement depends on mainly individual efforts, talent and abilities where social background and ascribed characteristics are not taken into account in attaining success or access (Hallinan, 2014, p. 247).

Starting from the 1960s, *conflict theorists* started criticizing the functionalist theory. The school was thought to be favoring the interests of the dominant group and were criticized for not being realistic and seeing an ideal version of how a world should be (Sadovnik, 2007, p.6). Rejecting the idea of meritocracy, they contend that it serves to deepen the existing inequalities (Hurn, 2014, p. 111). While functionalists take cohesion as the base of the social order, conflict theorists focus on struggle. The school produces or conveys social identities which either facilitates or impedes individuals' life chances (Bohonnek et.al, 2010, p.12). The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu brought discussions of conflict theory to the field of sociology of education combining it with functionalist approach. He developed his seminal theory of inequality. He theorized inequality as having three main dimensions; which he terms as economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Inequality stems from possession of these three capitals by

individuals or classes to varying degrees (Dillion, 2014, p. 428). *Economic capital* represents money, ownership of property, investments and all other kinds of material wealth. How it is related to educational inequality is that students coming from wealthier families are less likely to face obstacles in terms of educational opportunities. Social and cultural capital comparably are more intricate in explaining one's access to education and status in the society (Bohonnek et.al, 2010, p.12-13). *Social capital* denotes to individuals' networks, social connections, or alliances which directly or indirectly lead them to opportunities and enhance their education or position in the society (Dillion, 2014, p. 431). In terms of education, one's social circle, friends, family networks may substantially affect their educational status. *Cultural capital* refers to that cultural knowledge that confer social status and power beyond economic means, which can range from cultural competences, language mastery, degrees, qualifications, attitude or knowledge. Bourdieu looks into how formal education and daily cultural habits perpetuate one's cultural competence and transfers cultural capital into educational capital. An individual from a poor family can accumulate a great deal of capital both economic, social and cultural capital through education. He claims that academic capital depends on the cultural capital that the family passes onto the individual. Children whose parents have cultural capital and whose learning environments are supported with exposure to cultural activities tend to achieve better at schools (Dillion, 2015, p. 434-435). Hence, he claims that education serves reproducing social inequalities and plays a major role in social classes' struggle for power and maintaining privileged status and dominance.

Another prominent conflict theorists Randal Collins (1979) argues that educational qualifications have inflated over the decades and extended far more than the necessary skills needed for particular jobs. In parallel to massification of higher education, there has been an increase in job requirements and the level of degree studies. Collins questions whether most jobs require such complex skills and attributes the reason for such a demand to dominant class' desire to secure better positions in both professional and social life for themselves and their families as marginalized groups likewise had access to the same education opportunities (as cited in Hurn, 2014, p. 113).

Interactionist theory of education criticizes both functionalist and the conflict perspectives and as being macro-level sociological theories, they overlook what actually takes place at schools every day. Thus, interactionist theory is usually used with functionalism or conflict theory to have

a more comprehensive theory of society. Drawing on both conflict and interaction theoretical approaches, the British Sociologist Basil Bernstein (1990) argued that structural aspects of the system should be analyzed holistically in its relation to interactional aspects of the system at micro-level of school process. Analyzing speech patterns of students, he concludes that they mirror students' social class backgrounds and accordingly, students from working class backgrounds are regarded as disadvantageous in that schools are middle class organizations and students are exposed to the dominant code of schooling (Sadovnik, 2007, p. 10-11).

Rist (1977) is another interactionist theorist who attempted to demonstrate the ways in which everyday school processes such as labelling, linguistic discourse and ability grouping affect educational achievement and reproduces inequality. He argues that teachers' expectations of students based on such categories as ethnicity, race, class and gender affect students' educational outcomes and their self-perceptions (Sadovnik, 2007, p. 9).

An influential theory in the field that explains educational inequality is rational education decisions theory put forward by Raymond Boudon (1974), who explains it by class-related rational choices made by parents regarding their children's education. He explains emergence of educational disparities as a twofold process that stems from primary and secondary effects of stratification. The primary stratification refers to the link between social status and cultural background of the student, and the his/her academic achievement whilst secondary effects relates to the actual decision and choices made by the parents based on socioeconomic status driving underprivileged students into lower quality education choices or exiting the education system. Boudon's work ushered the way for development of rational choice theory, which has widely been used to explain equity in HE. Basically, rational choice theory postulates that educational inequality is caused by the rational choices of parents about their children's education. The main consideration in decision-making process is costs and benefits of higher education (Bohonnek et.al, 2010, p.14).

Recently issues of equity and social justice along with higher education policy have been underpinned by economic theories. One such theory is the human capital theory of which main tenet is prioritization of economic returns that both an individual and society gets from HE. From this perspective, investment in individual's education means investment in their human capital which is expected to yield benefits for society. In that sense, HE becomes a tool for economic

growth and development and increasing participation in HE is a form of investment (Wilson-Strydom, 2015, p. 25).

One of the most remarkable case of endorsing participation in higher education with economic motives is the widening participation policy, which is argued to be shaped by neoliberal perspectives. Widening participation which is often abbreviated as WP is a term that originated from the English context and promoted during the period of the New Labour government (1997-2010). It has become a major part of education policy of governments both in the UK and Europe. The concept has no agreed upon definition and is deemed to be highly contested (Burke, 2013, p. 13). WP policies are formulated with a view to increase number of students entering higher education from underrepresented groups. The UK context provides many initiatives taken towards increasing WP through pre-entry activities and projects that aims to raise aspirations of the young people to have higher education. One such project is the Aim Higher Project that covered such activities as summer schools, events, university visits, gifted and talented schemes in order to raise aspirations of underrepresented groups to have university education.

In the European context, WP can be considered falling under the concept of lifelong learning. Originally, widening participation and learning throughout life were the two components of LLL (Schmidt & Sursock, 2011 p. 15). At this point distinction one should distinguish between widening participation and increasing participation. While increasing participation merely refers to the increase in numbers, widening participation denotes to including more diverse students. With massification of HE, the increase in student numbers was equated to WP and taken for granted that open access and funding would promote WP. Likewise, having a LLL strategy does not mean that there also exists a WP objective inside the strategy. As EUA's *Trends 2010* Report reveals, many European countries consider lifelong learning, or WP as remaining outside the realm of their mainstream activities (Sursock, Smidt & Davies, 2010, p. 8). Today, there still does not seem to exist a common terminology in the European context for WP and widening access as also mentioned in EUA's *Trends 2010* Report (Sursock, Smidt & Davies, 2011, p.18). WP necessitates change throughout the institution by being integrated into an institutions' strategies, policies, plans and commitment of staff with designated responsibilities. In this regard, the following section provides an overview of how institutions address widening participation and categorizations of institutional responses.

2.2 Institutional Responses to Widening Participation

Thomas et al. (2005) make a distinction between two types of institutions based on the rationale behind an institution's involvement in WP. Whereas one seeks to meet institutional priorities such as increased student intake, diversity or meeting the needs of economy and/or the local region, the other one is engaged for mainly social justice reasons driven by national policy initiatives. They describe the second type as altruistic approach meaning that WP activities are promoted in HEI; yet, this does not entail any desire or commitment on part of the institution to admit students. Hence, WP activities are unlikely to cause change in the institution and is most often based on availability of external funding. Positive though it may sound in the first place, it is deemed to be unsustainable as it does not target student admission (Thomas as cited in Thomas, 2011, p. 9). Aside from altruistic approach to WP, Jones and Thomas (2005) categorize institutional responses to WP into 3 types as; academic, utilitarian and transformative.

The first strand known as “academic approach” is characterized by the word “lack of aspirations”. In this approach, students from underrepresented groups are considered as talented and having the potential to study yet; they are considered as having low aspirations. (Jones & Thomas, 2005, p. 616). Hence, the main purpose of activities is to raise students' aspirations, encouraging applications without envisaging any or no change in institutional structure and culture (Jones & Thomas 2005, p. 617). The institutions target this unused pool of talented students; yet, they are reluctant to change their admission processes or adapt their structures when students start their studies. The problem with this approach is that the reason for lack of participation is attributed to individual students not to the structural factors; hence no institutional change is necessitated. Rather, students from under-represented groups are assumed to fit into the institution. (Graham, 2010, p. 8).

In the second utilitarian approach, relationship between economy and HEIs become remarkable. HEIs are expected to adapt to the needs of the economy which demands highly qualified workforce. Accordingly, applicants to HEIs are considered as potential to meet this demand by being offered more vocational education or work-based programs. Thus, both access is widened to underrepresented groups and economic demands are met. To be able to respond to economic needs, curriculum reform is deemed necessary. Skills for employability are integrated

into the curriculum and students are supplemented with support modules (Thomas & Quinn, 2006, p. 104).

In this approach, potential applicants are not explicitly considered as to blame. It is accepted that structural barriers exist for student participation. These barriers could take the form of previous education experience, bad schooling, low academic achievement, low socio-economic background that prevent applicants from aiming for a higher education degree (Thomas, 2011, p. 9). Yet again students are expected to change to be able to adapt themselves to the institution. HEIs provide support so that they can fit into the system and eventually the wider goal of meeting the needs of economy is achieved. This could be done either through supplementary courses, joining summer schools, taking additional classes and thus equipping students with necessary qualifications required to be possessed before entry into the institution or offering special entry requirements such as lowering entry requirements. As Jones and Thomas (2005) put it “widening participation initiatives in utilitarian influenced higher education institutions are more or less “bolted on” to core work”. While such activities as mentoring, guidance, study support services are offered, they are not incorporated into the core activities of the universities; teaching and learning (p. 618).

Deriving its roots from the work of Paulo Freire (1972), the third strand *transformative approach* criticizes the deficient discourse attributed to the potential applicants, defining them as having low aspirations with lack of information or academic preparation. It contends that instead of expecting potential students to change to benefit from HE, diversity should be appreciated and HEIs should transform themselves to be able to meet needs and expectations of the students and simultaneously utilize knowledge and experiences that comes along with diversity. Yet, such transformation necessitates major structural changes and a more holistic approach covering underrepresented group, their families and communities is proposed. Emphasis is laid on informing all the activities of an institution by diversity stretching from knowledge production, transfer to internal structures and decision-making rather than setting short term initiatives undertaken by some dedicated practitioners and their internal structures of power and decision-making (Thomas & Quinn, 2006, p.105). Promoting student engagement in this model entails changes in admission processes, content and delivery of courses, and organizational and governance structures (Thomas, 2011, p.9). Curriculum needs to be adjusted in accordance with

input of the learners, trigger critical reflection and value knowledge that are relevant to underrepresented groups (Freire, 1972 as cited in Thomas & Quinn, 2006, p.106). As this approach requires a radical transformation, it is unlikely to see institutions falling under this category. As put by Sheeran *et al.* (2007), although some staff within these institutions may be engaged in practice that could be named as transformative, its effect would not be considerable as there would be institutional and national level restrictions i.e funding. Thus, transformative approach is suggested as something which “policy should aspire to” (Maringe et al., 2006, as cited in Graham, 2011, p.9).

Yet, Shaw et. al propose an alternative framework for institutional responses to including diverse student body. Based on Jones and Thomas’ model, Shaw et al. (2007, pp. 38-39) develop an analogous threefold typology in which academic and transformative strands are kept; yet, utilitarian approach is replaced by differential provision. Shaw et.al (2007) criticize Jones’ utilitarian approach in that it could be considered as a set of drivers rather than being a distinct organizational approach. They claim that *differential provision* in their framework is derived from various drivers and factors by which they respond to some particular aspects of government policies. Their model suggests that in contrast to academic approach, HEIs are susceptible to needs of diverse student body and feel the need to adapt themselves; however, this change may not become prevalent throughout the whole institution and result in differential provision (p. 58). It is also challenged that HEIs are expected to fall under one of these categories. As Graham puts it (2010) these models present a general overview of an institution’s response to WP. He asserts that these categorizations may be useful as a departure point; yet, argues that models remain inadequate in explaining institutions’ responses to widening participation work as the institutions have varying, non-homogenous and at times conflicting discourses (p. 10).

Various studies for checking institutional change regarding WP have been noted in the literature. In the book on *Institutional Transformation to Engage a Diverse Body*, Thomas (2011) lists these approaches, one of which was developed by herself that includes; (1) *Institution-wide understanding and ownership of WP*; (2) *Visible commitment to WP which influences strategic decision-making*; (3) *Effective processes&structures to ensure non-reliance on committed individuals*; (4) *Inclusive culture with engagement of the staff across the institution and throughout the student lifecycle*; (5) *Inclusive learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum approaches*; (6)

Integrated outreach and admission processes; (7) Use of data, monitoring, evaluation and research to improve practice and inform decision-making; (8) Effective funding (p. 82).

Secondly, another study by May and Bridger (2010) identified six key steps for a cultural change; “(1) *Ensure a shared vision and inclusive philosophy*; (2) *Provide leadership for inclusion*; (3) *Be systematic, holistic and proactive*; (4) *Build and tailor an evidence base*; (5) *Engage stakeholders through a range of methods*; (6) *Provide opportunities for dialogue and debate* “(as cited in Thomas, 2011, p.83).

In their study on Australian higher education institutions’ response to the WP agenda, Kilpatrick & Johns (2014, p. 27) argue that universities desiring to be socially inclusive transcend beyond the traditional concept of admission and devise broad, long-term, integrated strategies with detailed planning that spells out goals, strategies, and indicators of success covering both domains of access, participation and empowerment. Citing from Naylor, Baik & James (2013), they reiterate the fact that social inclusion in HE goes beyond the idea of open access for all but rather inspire aspiration, and provide support to non-traditional students as they progress through their studies. In that context they refer to two different guiding principles underpinning socially inclusive universities. One pertains to the Australian Council for Educational Research’s guidelines (2011) of socially inclusive universities which are summarized by Kilpatrick & Johns (2014) as having; (1) *A strength-based approach that considers socially disadvantaged students and staff as strengths bringing diversity to the university rather than labelling them as problems*; (2) *An all-encompassing and proactive approach, where social inclusion is integrated into the main missions of the university (learning, teaching and research), and enabled by various strategies embodying participation and empowerment*; (3) *An integrated strategy that embraces social inclusion at levels of access, empowerment and participation*; (4) *A holistic view of participation and engagement that stretches to whole student engagement cycle from aspiration forming to graduate transitions (p. 41).*

The second set of principles for socially inclusive universities addressed in Kilpatrick & Johns’ study belong to Cairnduff (2011). The set of principles that are considered to be shared by socially inclusive universities are as follows; “(1) *Commitment to deep and inclusive community engagement for inclusion issues*; (2) *collaboration with all stakeholders*; (3) *strong emphasis on outcomes for students and the community*, (4) *adopting strengths-based rather than deficit*

models”. And she identifies those actions to be taken to operationalize these as follows; (1) *Ensuring multiple access and pathways into HE* (i.e vocational education and training pathways, high achievers, equity scholarships); (2) *Offering programs and services to promote social inclusion* (aspiration/awareness programs, professional learning programs for staff); (3) *Practicing inclusive teaching* (curriculum, delivery of content and assessment); (4) *Providing academic and social support programs for students* (bridging and enabling programs, mentoring, academic support, focus on first year student retention); (5) *Achieving diversity in faculty, staff and student* (as cited in Kilpatrick & Johns, 2014, pp. 27-31).

In the European context, The LLL Charter (2008, pp. 5-7) determined the steps that HEIs need to take to internalize LLL in universities: (1) *Incorporating widening access and LLL into institutional strategies*; (2) *Offering education and learning to a diversified student population*; (3) *Adapting study programs so that they can broaden participation and attract returning adult learners*; (4) *Providing guidance and counselling services*; (5) *Recognizing prior learning to facilitate entry to HE*; (6) *Integrating LLL into the institutional quality culture*; (7) *Strengthening the relationship between research, teaching and innovation in terms of LLL*; (8) *Reinforcing reforms to create a flexible and creative learning environment for all students*; (9) *Establishing partnerships at local, regional, national and international level to offer attractive and relevant programs*; (10) *Acting as role models of LLL institutions*.

Having presented institutional responses to issues of access, the following section narrows down the issue to refugees and brings together current body of literature on access of students from refugee backgrounds to HE. It seeks to analyze main challenges for higher education institutions regarding students’ integration into the system.

2.3 Challenges against Refugee Higher Education

Literature reveals that many factors complicate refugees' access to higher education. Many of the barriers refugees experience such as poverty, trauma, violence, interrupted education or language difficulties are faced by other minority or disadvantaged groups as well. Thus, the educational needs of refugees have traditionally been considered within the general programs for underachieving groups (Stevenson & Willot, 2007, p. 672). Kooij (2015) offers a broad review of the literature about those factors affecting equal access of students to higher education and categorizes them into two major groups as (1) *socio-economic* and (2) *structural factors* (p. 32). She defines *socio-economic* conditions as those attributes that cannot be easily changed such as one's socio-economic status, demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability or race and geographical closeness. Socio-economic factors are generally attributed to family and social circle such as peers. While family influences future prospects of education by funding and awareness-raising for their children, social circle serves as affecting educational choices of individuals. She asserts that demographic factors such as age, gender, migrant status, race or ethnicity likewise may have constraining effect on access to education. While disabled students may face accessibility issues and physical barriers, students with migrant backgrounds may have insufficient mastery of language, lack of necessary qualifications, choosing tracks that does not lead to university education and so on (p. 33).

Structural factors are related to the macro level factors such as education system of a country and are determined by public policies which include the HE system capacity, diversification level of the HE system, admission conditions, the cost of education, availability of various learning modes and student services and support systems (p. 33-34). Funded under the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Commission, the EQUINET project (2009-2012) was carried out with a view to increase access to HE for non-traditional and marginalized groups on the basis of equity principle. Bringing together various stakeholders for the purpose of the research, the research network aimed at explaining inequalities in educational attainment of people with migrant and non-migrant backgrounds and addressed barriers in accessing to education stemming from the following three main reasons and presenting inequalities between immigrant and non-immigrant groups to have a HE degree in the EU countries; (1) *educational background* (covering issues such as recognition of non-formal and informal education, home-schooling, distance

learners), (2) *socio-economic conditions* (covering issues such as access for people in employment, those having families, low income groups, dependency on parents) and (3) *structural problems in HE* (issues such as admission, funding, curricula, governance) (Camilleri et.al, 2013, p.5).

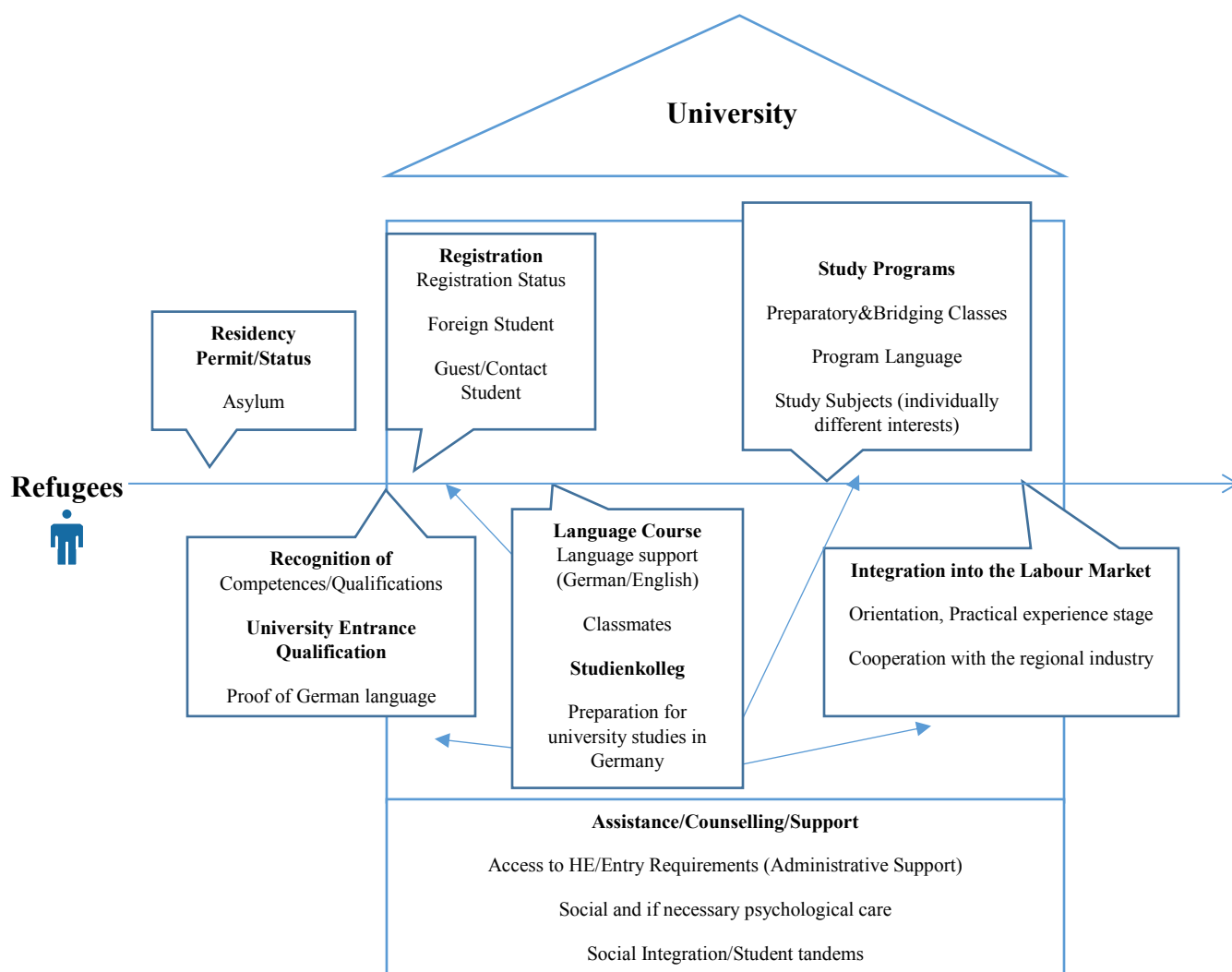
However, as Stevenson & Willot argue (2007), along with sharing many common problems with other disadvantaged and minority groups, refugees have their separate and distinct support needs. They identify the needs and challenges of refugees mentioned by various stakeholders involved in their study as (1) *emotional support needs*, (2) *aspirations*, (3) *poverty*, (4) *lack of knowledge about the education system*, (5) *uncertainty over asylum status*, (6) *inadequate and interrupted education*, (7) *language needs*, (8) *lack of encouragement to access HE* (p.672). Dryden-Peterson & Giles (2010) summarize those impediments faced by refugee students as (1) *lack of financial means*, *lack of identification and documentation*, (2) *differing admission requirements*, and (3) *lack of language proficiency*. In a similar vein, a survey conducted by Cremonini (2016) points out the major blocks experienced by refugee students as (1) *scarcity of funds to support family and studies*, (2) *inability to have employment*, (3) *language*, (4) *curriculum differences between home and host country*, (5) *lack of transcripts and identification documents*. Anselme and Hands (2010) identify five major categories of barriers; (1) *limited implementation of the existing legal and protection instruments*, (2) *the need for special support*, (3) *costs of post-primary education*, (4) *lack of reliable systems for recognition*, (5) *differential barriers to access*.

As a response to the recent migration influx, the European Union Association (EUA, 2015) launched a web-based survey to gather information on the initiatives taken by higher education institutions, related organizations and networks to support refugee students and researchers. The EUA compiles the initiatives under six headings, which are (1) *recognition of studies and prior learning*, (2) *access to higher education*, (3) *financial support for refugee students*, (4) *preparatory and bridging courses*, (5) *integration measures* and (6) *employment opportunities for researchers and HEI staff*. The list acts as a framework for activities of higher education institutions on how to respond to the refugee crisis. Similarly, the results of the EU Survey launched by the European Commission (2015) sketch out challenges encountered by higher education institutions and refugee students, which are categorized under three headings of (1) *integration in society*, (2) *academic integration* and (3) *changing mentalities/opening minds*. Challenges that fall under the category of integration in society are (1) *lack of knowledge of the host country/university*; (2) *need*

for integration activities, (3) lack of knowledge of the host country language. Concerning academic integration, (1) lack of documentation justifying diplomas/credits/level of prior learning and competences, (2) lack of official status to enroll at university and (3) lack of access to education in the camps constitute challenges. Under the category of changing mentalities/opening minds, (1) fear of racism/radicalization and (2) chances for HEIs and enterprises to learn from refugees are listed.

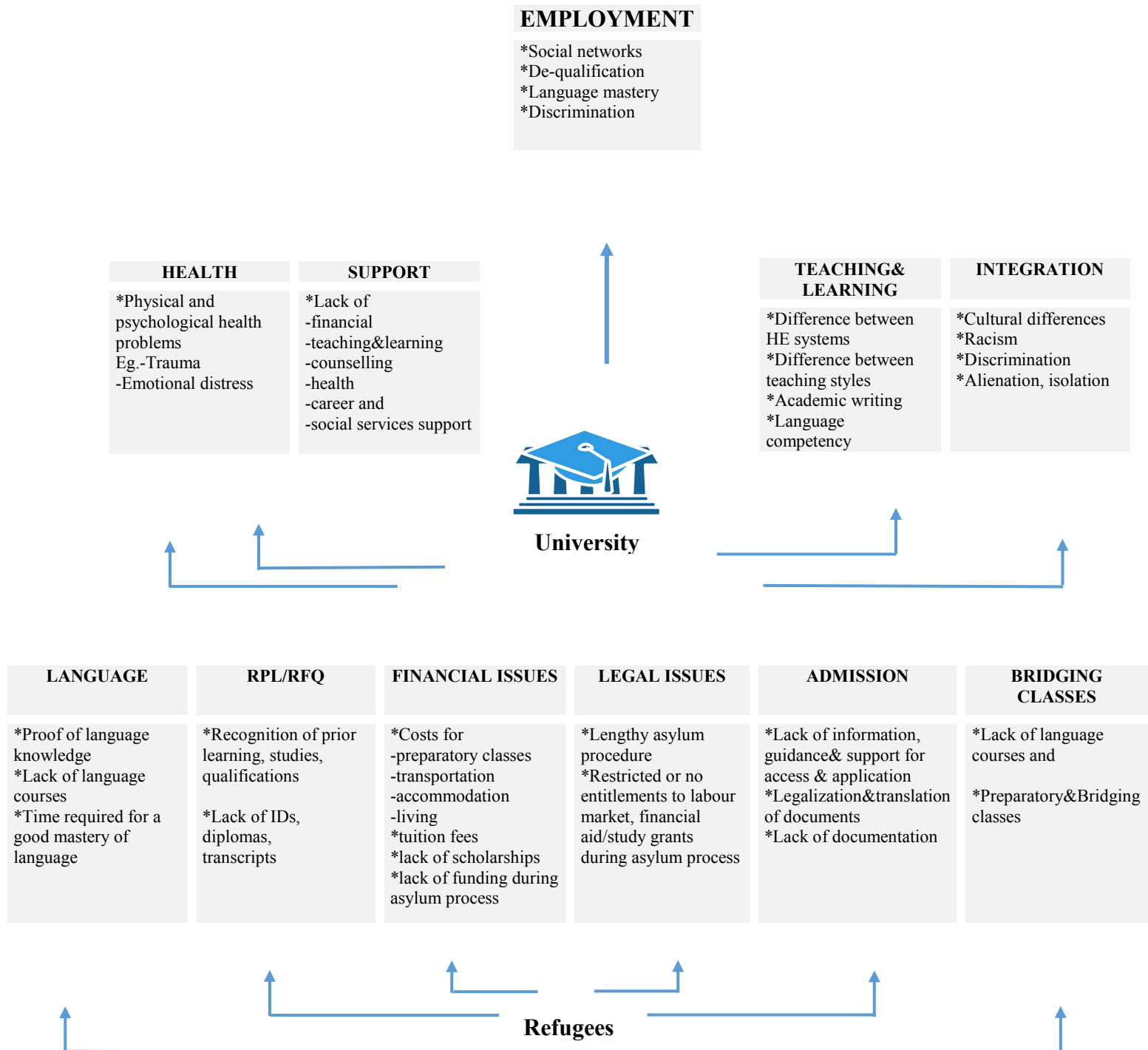
In another recent study, Vogel & Schwikal (2015) present a schematic description of challenges that are faced by refugees in accessing higher education in Germany.

Figure 1. Challenges in accessing higher education by refugees (Vogel & Schwikal, 2015, p. 11)
(translated from German by the author)



Bringing together the commonly addressed challenges in the literature, the following figure attempts to summarize them.

Figure 2. Challenges facing refugee higher education (Compiled by the author)



Major themes emerging from the literature could be further analyzed in detail. The need for financial support stand out as a significant factor impeding refugee students' access to higher education. For many refugee students, higher education degree seems unattainable due to the high costs of attendance to a university. In most cases, refugee students rely solely on limited scholarships which barely covers their expenses. As majority of these scholarships are merit-based, they can be of help to a limited number of refugee students. In many cases, students who are supported by their families can manage to continue with their studies (Anselme and Hands, 2010, p. 92).

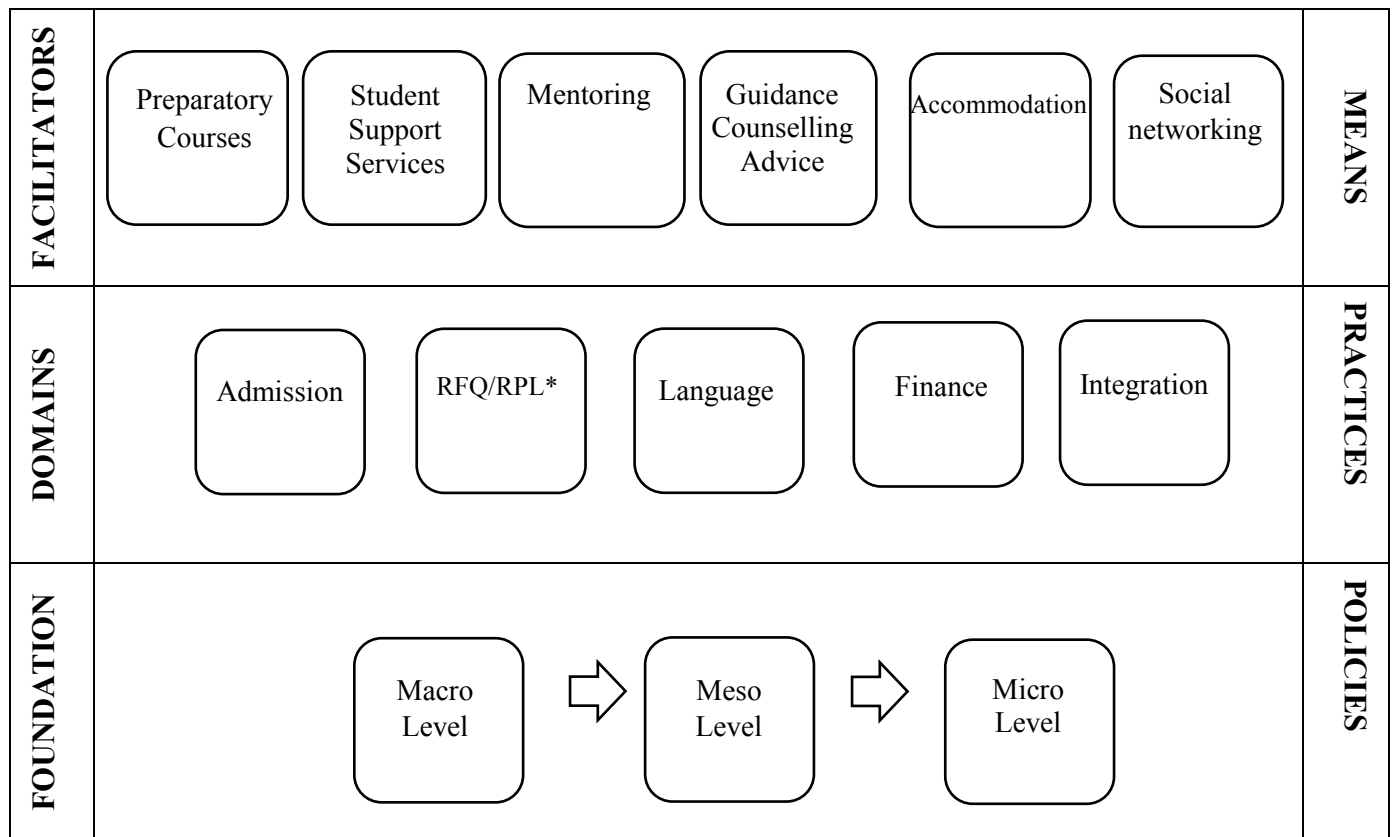
Access to higher education is further complicated by the lack of documentation that is required for application processes including birth certificates, transcripts, diplomas, exam results or IDs as the conditions leading refugees to migrate such as war or life threat may make it impossible for refugees to obtain these documents. Hence, HEIs may require refugee students to take up additional exams, classes or oral tests to ensure equivalency of foreign qualification of students, which may prolong entry of students to HE. In most cases, conditions of war, displacement, and migration renders verification of documents from the country of origin impossible. For that reason, HEIs are further required to take necessary measures to avoid possible cases of fraud.

Another issue that is commonly addressed in the literature relates to transition/bridging/preparatory programs needed for refugee students' integration into higher education. As put by Krause et.al, (2005), the university may be a culturally alienating place for students in terms of social and physical environment. Teaching and learning activities, norms, expectations, culture and social bonds of the new setting pose challenges for students, who encounter difficulty of familiarizing themselves with customs of a foreign community (Earnest, Joyce, de Mori&Silvagni, 2010, p. 159). Research reveals that assisting students in their engagement with campus life and studies yield more student satisfaction and retention rates. In their study on Australian HE context, Earnest, Joyce, de Mori&Silvagni (2010, p. 170) note that bridging or preparatory courses prior to university studies were desired by refugee students participating in the study. The courses that were required the most were linked to specialized academic and general support services such as language, academic writing, referencing, avoiding plagiarism and awareness training for counselling and academic staff.

One other factor that bears critical importance for refugees is the acquisition of the host country's language. Good command of language not only facilitates integration into the society but also enables swift access to HE and financial means. Esser (2006) accounts for factors that make language acquisition of immigrants successful, which are motivation, access, ability and costs of learning. While high level social and cultural differences between immigrant groups and host group are regarded as affecting motivation unfavorably, availability of language learning courses, more contact with the host majority group, and friendships are considered as positive factors. Existing of inter-ethnic conflicts, hostility towards foreigners and high level of ethnic concentration among immigrant groups are considered as inhibiting factors (as cited in Camilleri et. al, 2013, p. 8). Universities have language requirements; which takes time for refugees who are new to the host country to fulfil. Refugees' pace of language learning might be affected by lack of language courses, financial means for language learning and other legal issues that may prevent them from having state support for language classes.

Given the background on the review of the literature on refugees, widening participation and institutional responses of universities, a conceptual framework for analysis of refugees' access to HE is proposed. It was adapted from the conceptual framework proposed by Ager and Strang (2008) for identifying key domains of integration into the host society. Ager and Strang (2008) identify ten domains under four dimensions of *foundation*, *facilitators*, *social connectors* and *means&markers*. *Foundation* refers to refugees' having rights and citizenship for engagement in the host society. *Facilitators* have two domains of *language and cultural knowledge* and *security and stability*, which refers to refugees' acquiring language skills and cultural knowledge along with feeling safe and mutual understanding of each other's culture by both refugees and the host society. There are three domains under the heading of *social connectors*, which are *social bonds* for refugees to develop relations with their own ethnic group, *social bridges* to develop relations with members of the host society and *social links* to access social services. Finally *means and markers* enable refugees to have access to employment, housing, education and healthcare.

Figure 3. Conceptual Framework for Analysis of Refugee's Integration to HE (adapted from Ager&Strang, 2008)



* RFQ: Recognition of Foreign Qualifications; RPL: Recognition of Prior Learning

In this conceptual framework foundation refers to macro, meso and micro level policy context which influence refugees' access to higher education. Macro level policies stand for policies, laws, rules, procedures of supranational institutions that affect policy making processes at meso and micro levels such as European Union or any other binding policy context such as common immigration laws, Bologna process, higher education laws, or Lisbon Treaty and so on. While meso-level refers to processes taking at the national level, government policies related to migration or higher education, micro level refers to institutional processes, activities of individual HE institutions, units, student unions, individual students, researchers or academicians. For the purpose of this thesis, European, national and institutional policies concerning refugees' access to HE will be analyzed. At the national and institutional level, dimensions of admission, recognition of foreign qualifications, language, finance and integration will be utilized.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological framework that guides the research. It discusses and justifies the research design, research strategy, and data collection techniques employed in the empirical collection of data for the research. Next, the data collection procedure along with designing the instrument are described and sampling strategies are explained. It is followed by data analysis and discussion of reliability and validity of the study. Finally, challenges related to the case study in the given context and data collection are presented.

3.1 Research Design

The aim of this section is to present research design and justify use of qualitative approach in line with the research strategy, research objectives and data collection techniques that help determine qualitative nature of the research.

The research delves into Austrian HEIs response to inclusion of refugee students by adopting qualitative case study as research strategy and by collecting qualitative data from pertinent stakeholders. The study unit of analysis is public universities in Austria. There are four types of universities in Austria; public universities, universities of applied sciences, university colleges of teacher education and private universities. Public universities were chosen as unit of analysis as they participate in the refugee initiative of the UNIKO. Yin (2009, p. 18) defines case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between context and phenomenon are not clearly evident”. As Yin puts it (2009, p. 2), case studies are preferred when (a) *why* and *how* questions are asked, (b) the researcher has little control over events and c) important contextual conditions are interlinked to the contemporary phenomenon under inquiry. The case study data in this study relies on two data collection techniques: semi-structured interviews and documentary secondary data. The reason for choosing qualitative data collection techniques of interviews and documents is inextricably linked with the research objective of the thesis. First and foremost, one of the research objectives of this thesis is to shed light on a previously understudied group of people-

refugee students, their access to HE in Austria. Since the topic has not been previously studied in Austrian context, the study assumes an explanatory nature by obtaining information from diverse participants. Secondly, the research seeks to identify barriers, which requires an in-depth probing, i.e examples, experiences, explanations that simply goes beyond gathering facts and figures. As Locke, Spirduso & Silverman (1987) explain it, the purpose of qualitative research is to comprehend a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction. Morse (as cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 22) states that qualitative approach is preferred over quantitative approach when addressing an issue, concept or a phenomenon upon which a little research has been conducted or when the topic has never been studied with a certain sample or group of people, or current theories do not account for a particular group or sample, it merits qualitative approach. As the qualitative approach is exploratory, it provides more useful insight into what is being studied and used more when one needs to learn more from participants through exploration (Creswell, 2009, p.19). Hence, interviews were chosen as one of the qualitative data collection techniques that is commonly used in case studies. As Yin puts it (2009: 106) ‘interviews are essential sources of case study information’, as they can cast light into complex situations. Semi-structured interviews were used since it enables the researcher not only to have specific information needed from all respondents (Merriam, 2015, p. 90) but also allows some degree of flexibility in conversation for follow-up questions and prospects of rich knowledge producing (Brinkmann, 2014, p.286). Thirdly, the research aims to find out if any policies, strategies or approaches related to refugee students exist, which entails a documentary analysis of policies, strategies and practices of HEIs, which necessitates use of documentary data, which likewise are considered to be rich source of valuable information in qualitative studies.

3.2 Data Collection

First source of data drew on semi-structured interviews collected from various stakeholders representing Austrian higher education system. 18 semi-structured interviews with members of senior management from the Ministry, UNIKO, public universities, expert and students were conducted spanning a five-month period between February and June 2016. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

Initially 30 people ranging from experts, vice-rectors, admission offices, language centers and student unions from universities in the regions of Carinthia, Styria, Salzburg, Vienna and

Lower Austria, were contacted. Only 13 of the contacted vice-rectors, student admission officers, experts, student unions and other relevant stakeholders were voluntary to take part in the research. All the 5 remaining participants out of 18 were students.

14 face-to-face interviews were conducted whereas four participants preferred to reply via e-mail. During face-to-face interviews, 13 participants agreed for their interviews to be audio-recorded by a voice recorder of a mobile phone. Notes were taken down during one interview, in which the participant gave no consent for audio-recording. Consent was obtained from all participants. Consent letters including information on the purpose and scope of the thesis and questions, participation terms and confidentiality were sent to participants. In some cases, consent was obtained verbally before the interview. Interview questions were not sent beforehand yet those participants who wanted to conduct the interview via e-mail were provided with questions.

Table 1. *Number of Interviewees by Position*

Position	Number of interviewees
Senior Administrator at BMFWF	1
Recognition of Qualifications Expert at BMFWF	1
An expert from UNIKO	1
Senior Administrators at HEIs	4
Head of an Admission Office at a HEI	2
Head of a Language Center at a HEI	1
Expert	1
Students	5
Student Unions	2
Total	18

3.3 Sampling Strategies

Two sampling strategies were employed in the study to best select the sample from the target population: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. In purposive sampling, individuals

or sites are chosen intentionally to comprehend central phenomenon in question. As Patton puts it (2001, p.243), purposive sampling enables researcher to select “information rich” participants and sites intentionally. Hence, participants were purposefully selected due to their relevance, involvement, position and authority on the issue of refugee students’ access to HE. In the first round of the interviews, two senior representatives in the field of HE and recognition of foreign qualifications from The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and University (BMFWF) and a representative from UNIKO were interviewed with a view to identify current and future national policy initiatives. The UNIKO was selected as they launched the MORE Initiative for refugee students, academicians and scientists for orientation in study fields, language training and knowledge sharing at a university level. In the second round of the interviews, participants from university senior management, admission offices, and a language center were interviewed. Participants at universities were selected based on their responsibility and involvement in the refugee project initiative of MORE. Senior administrators were chosen in order to obtain information on general strategy and policies of universities. As the final round, recognized refugees who fled from their countries in the last couple of years were selected to be able to reflect the most recent situation and experiences. Finally, for the expert interview, a professor specialized in both HE and migration studies were consulted twice right at the beginning and at the end of the study.

Along with purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used to reach out to participants. In snowballing technique, the sample unfolds and grows with each interview as the each interviewee is asked to suggest another person for interviewing (Babbie, 2015, p.188) Snowball sampling proves to be useful in certain research situations when identifying best people to study. As a foreign researcher carrying out a research in another country, snowball sampling assisted in identifying key institutions and people to be interviewed and reaching out to them.

3.4 Instruments

Qualitative data as mentioned previously were gathered through semi-structured interviews and documents. For semi-structured interviews, an interview guide identifying themes were designed and questions were developed building on the relevant literature prior to interviews. Based on interviewee’s position, questions falling under categories of national policy, institutional

policy, strategies, access and admission, recognition of formal qualifications, language, funding and integration measures were asked.

Table 2. Breakdown of themes and questions

Themes	Ministry	Vice- rectors	Admission	Students	Expert	Uniko
A. National Policy&Strategy	√				√	
B. Institutional Policy&Strategy		√			√	√
C. Access&Admission		√	√	√	√	√
D. Recognition of Formal Qualifications	√	√	√	√	√	√
E. Language F. Funding G. Integration		√		√	√	√
H. Challenges	√	√	√	√	√	√
I. Suggestions&Future Directions	√	√	√	√	√	√

Secondary data came from a variety of documented sources such as legal documents, national and institutional documents; publicly available policies, strategies and performance agreements of the universities and websites.

3.5 Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was adopted as data analysis strategy for both interviews and documents. According to definition of Hsieh & Shannon (2005, p. 1278), content analysis is “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns”. Research that adopts qualitative content analysis centers on the content or contextual meaning of the text. Whilst data may be obtained from interviews, surveys, focus groups or articles, books or manuals, the purpose of the analysis is to closely scrutinize the data in order to categorize large amount of data into smaller numbers of categories representing the similar meaning (Hsieh & Shannon, p. 1278).

Document analysis is a systematic procedure to interpret and elicit meaning. The analytic procedure necessitates finding, deciding, interpreting and synthesizing data contained in the documents. Then data obtained are organized into themes, and categories through content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003 as cited in Bowen, 2009, p. 27-28). For the analysis of performance agreements, seventeen words were determined for keyword search; *Diversity* (Diversität), *Minority* (Minorität), *Equality* (Gleichstellung), *Inequality* (Ungleichheit), *Migration/Migrant/Migration background* (Migration/Migrant /Migrationshintergrund), *Asylum* (Asyl), *Asylum-seeker* (Asylwerber), *Recognised refugee* (Anerkannte Flüchtlinge/Asylberechtigte), *Refugee* (Flüchtlinge), *Ethnic* (Ethnisch), *Social inclusion* (Sozial Inklusion), *Disadvantaged* (Benachteiligt), *Underrepresented* (Unterrepräsentiert), *Integration* (Integration), *Educationally disadvantaged* (Bildungsferne). Then the data were organized into major themes, categories and case examples through content analysis.

For interviews, a directed content analysis approach was adopted. In directed approach, content analysis is guided by previous research or theory which enables the researcher to have predetermined key concepts, themes, or variables as initial coding categories and the content analysis is; therefore, deductive (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Yet, it should be noted that other findings arising from the study could be presented as new themes or subthemes.

3.6 Trustworthiness

The qualitative researchers often employ a variety of terms to refer to accuracy of their study such as *authenticity*, *trustworthiness* or *credibility*. One commonly used method for that purpose is triangulation of various data sources. Triangulation refers to a process of eliciting data from different individuals, utilizing different types of data or data collection methods (Creswell, 2012, p. 259). For the purpose of this study, data was collected by a wide range of stakeholders; universities, students, student unions, ministry, experts and other relevant stakeholders. Further, different types of data collection tools; interviews, documentary research, website analysis were utilized. Additionally, experts were consulted at the beginning, during and at the end of the study to have a better insight into the study context, discuss research design and findings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS&FINDINGS

4.1 European Initiatives for Refugees

Pursuant to the Bologna Process Ministerial Conference in Armenia in 2015, a new agenda was laid down with the Yerevan Communiqué for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The document brings attention to the serious challenges EHEA is confronted with. In that respect, economic and social crisis accompanied by high levels of unemployment, immigration and resulting demographic changes, marginalization of young people, recent conflicts within and between countries coupled with radicalization and extremism are named as the greatest challenges (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015, p.1). The new vision envisages an EHEA where higher education is geared towards laying the ground for inclusive societies by equipping students with the competences and skills necessary for European citizenship, innovation and employment. The emphasis is laid on social dimension of higher education. To this end, Ministers in Yerevan, agreed to endorse higher education institutions in their efforts to widen participation in higher education and foster learning activities for different types of learners. Mobility opportunities for students and staff from conflict areas are envisaged and flexibility for them to return back when conditions allow (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015, p.2-3).

On October 2015, the European Commission published a background paper titled “Integration into higher education of newly arrived migrants and people with a migrant background” of which purpose was to explore how the European Union could support Member States and HEIs in coping with challenges of the recent migration and opportunities of integration into higher education. Drawing attention to the key role that HEIs can play in integrating refugees, the Commission suggests facilitation of refugees’ access into HE through fair and swift system of recognition of prior learning, tailor-made upskilling and bridging courses, early and intensive language provision, support, information and individual guidance and advice, and elimination of financial or legal restrictions. The paper provides a detailed account of activities and initiatives that HEIs could take to facilitate the process and thus serves as guidelines for HEIs (European Commission, 2015).

Further, the EU has started to gather initiatives taken by individual universities in different countries through an online survey. The European Commission (EC) aims to contribute by sharing these initiatives and by supporting through its programs. In this respect, the new Erasmus+ put a special emphasis on supporting projects that aim social inclusion particularly refugees and migrants along with projects targeted at preventing radicalization. In one such project funded by the Erasmus+, a toolkit including information on education systems of third countries, e-learning modules and guidelines for effective procedures is being prepared for recognizing qualifications of refugees. Starting from summer 2016, the EU will offer linguistic support to refugees by providing 100,000 Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support licenses for language assessments and another 100,000 licenses for online language courses for over a period of 3 years within a specific framework. Additionally, the EU initiated the program *Science for Refugees*, of which aim is to match asylum-seeking and refugee scientists and researchers with scientific institutions which volunteer to welcome them and offer jobs (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/migration/higher-education-refugees_en.htm). European University Association (EUA) likewise responded to the refugee crisis and launched in 2015 the Refugees Welcome Map with a view to document and showcase initiatives undertaken by the individual universities in addressing the refugee crisis (<http://eua.be/activities-services/eua-campaigns/refugees-welcome-map>).

Along with initiatives taken by supranational bodies, individual countries set out to taking various measures in order to facilitate refugees' entry into HE. *Norway* introduced a fast-track procedure to evaluate qualifications of refugees without documentation of their academic or professional qualifications. The purpose of the project is to diminish waiting time and accelerate refugees' integration into Norwegian society. Within the scope of a pilot project, a document called "Qualifications Passport for Refugees" was issued which covers such information as the applicant's academic or professional achievements, work experience or language proficiency. The evaluation is based on available documents and interviews with expert case officers. Though not necessarily qualify the passport holder to enroll in a university degree program right away, it offers a temporary support to refugees and is valid for 3 years. Norway further suggested having a wider European level "Toolkit for Recognition for Refugees" in which European countries adopt common recognition procedures for academic and professional qualifications. The ultimate aim is to have a "European Qualifications Passport" to be recognized by all European countries (Malgina & Skjerven, 2016)

The University of Oslo launched a program called “*Academic Practice*” in collaboration with the Municipality of Oslo. Refugees holding at least one degree and wish to continue with graduate studies are offered internship opportunities even if they do not have necessary language proficiency. Without being enrolled as students, they participate in the research team and perform administrative and academic duties. Depending on their academic capabilities, they have the likelihood of getting classes and taking exams. The aim is to allow refugees familiarize themselves with the university, studies and Norwegian culture (<http://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2016/09/norway-develops-qualifications-passport-for-refugees/>).

Having received the most number of refugees, *Germany* initiated the Integra program led by DAAD German Academic Exchange Service for which around 100 million Euros were allocated by the Federal Ministry of Education until the year 2019. The Ministry is to fund up to 2,400 places at preparatory colleges or universities offering both language instruction and subject-specific courses to integrate academically qualified refugees into the universities. Universities monthly receive 420 euros per participant from the Integra funding scheme (<https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/infos/en/41996-funding-programme-integrating-refugees-in-degree-programmes-integra/>).

The Ministry is additionally supporting student-initiated “Welcome-Students Helping Refugees” program. Currently, 151 “Welcome” projects are being funded by the DAAD for orientation, guidance or language mentoring of refugees. The universities will further be able to employ a staff member for mentoring, offering tutorials, language mentoring, producing information materials or assisting with translations or language courses (<https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/infos/en/41993-funding-programme-welcome-students-helping-refugees/>).

Moreover, examination and processing fees for TestAS (The Aptitude Test for Academic Studies), uni-assist (University Application Service for International Students) and the online assessment test onSET-Deutsch and onSET-English are covered by the Ministry funding. Uni-assist is developing a special information portal for refugee students. TestAS measuring an applicant’s scholastic aptitude has been translated into Arabic so that a large group of refugees may take the test in their native language. Accordingly, refugees may take the TestAS for free on both flexible and fixed dates offered by the responsible TestDaF Institute

(<https://www.daad.de/der-daad/fluechtlinge/infos/en/42013-testas-uni-assist-and-onset-for-refugees.pdf>).

In Netherlands “*Refugees in Higher Education Task Force*” was established in collaboration with various stakeholders in the HE such as the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF), EP-Nuffic, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, ECHO (the national expertise *center* for diversity policy), the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU). The aim of the initiative is to assist refugees with language and preparatory programs and solve difficulties in the admission process for refugees. Along with entry into HE, the task force intends to identify and solve difficulties in entry into the labor market (http://www.vsnul.nl/en_GB/refugees.html).

Besides, the Dutch government has been supporting Syrian refugees with access to HE in the region of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan in collaboration with the NGO Spark. A scholarship program for refugees was established in cooperation with the University of Gaziantep in Turkey. 100 Syrian refugees were provided with vocational training through the International Syrian University in Exile organized by the SPARK through funding from the Netherlands (<http://theglobalcoalition.org/providing-access-to-higher-education-for-syrian-refugees-and-internally-displaced-people-idps/>). Recently in February 2016, the Dutch Development Organization for Education and Entrepreneurship and SPARK signed an agreement under the motto of “*Higher Education 4 Syrians*” in to help refugees have access to HE. SPARK and the Netherlands plan to enroll 10,000 Syrians in HE in the region (<https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2016/02/03/thousands-of-syrian-students-to-return-to-campus>). The underlying idea is to equip them with the skills to restructure Syria in the aftermath of the war in the long-term, and to pay back to their host countries in the short term. Currently, 18 HEIs in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan have been offering programs at lower tuition fees for refugee students. Some have altered their curriculum to Arabic to be able to meet students’ needs (<http://theglobalcoalition.org/providing-access-to-higher-education-for-syrian-refugees-and-internally-displaced-people-idps/>).

National and Institutional Policies

The aim of this section is to present the national and institutional policies that could be deemed as relevant to access of refugee students. To this end, strategic national policies, especially official policies pertaining to diversity management in higher education and performance agreements of the universities were analyzed. As most performance agreements were already drafted before the arrival of refugee students, it is unlikely to expect specific policies merely addressing refugee students. Nonetheless, actions, projects and plans geared towards diversity management and underrepresented groups relate to refugee students as well. Hence the aim of this section remains to portray a general picture of policies and then move towards specific analysis of institutional documents to track sight of policies concerning diversity management and WP.

4.2 National Policies

At the national level, Austria has been striving towards a policy goal of WP in HE. Two developments could be regarded as key in that respect; first, development of concept of diversity management within Austrian HE system and second; development of a national strategy on social dimension of HE.

To begin with diversity management, Austria adopts the Austrian Society of Diversity's definition which defines diversity management as "a multi-dimensional approach with the aim of furthering the outcome-oriented perception, practice and promotion of diversity in social systems, such as profit and non-profit organisations, public organisations, groups and teams." (BMWWF, n.d, para. 1). Whilst at the European level, European Treaty, European Convention on Human Rights, Treaty of Amsterdam and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights lay the legal basis against discrimination and equality, in Austria *Federal Equal Treatment Act 'Bundesgleichbehandlungsgesetz'* (1993) constitutes the main legal act for anti-discrimination and equality. With an amendment in 2004, the law stipulated that no one can be subject to direct or indirect discrimination in relation to an employment or educational relationship on the grounds of gender, ethnic affiliation, religion or belief, age or sexual orientation. In official documents in the field of HE, along with this general emphasis on equality, specific groups that merit particular attention are defined. In this sense, prevalence of gender and disability dimensions of diversity has been striking. In the Universities Act of 2002, focus on gender issues and gender mainstreaming i.e equality of the sexes (§ 2); gender equality, and the advancement of women, (§ 3), career

advancement plan for women and equal opportunities plan (§ 20b) are striking. Further, the Act has a special chapter on gender equality (Universities Act, 2002, p. 43). Along with gender equality, special attention to the needs of the handicapped (§ 3) is remarkable. While equality of social opportunity is mentioned once (§ 3), ensuring accessibility for non-traditional applicants is stipulated in Article 14g. Article 14g further specifies that § 41 of the Federal Equal Opportunities Act shall apply to the implementation of the admission or selection procedure (Universities Act, 2002)

Recently other dimensions of diversity such as age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so forth have started to receive attention as well. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy (BMFWF) explains the need for diversity management by diverse student population due to increasing mobility, migration and internationalization and asserts that coupled with social inequalities, emerging situation necessitates appropriate strategies and measures on part of the universities (BMFWF, n.d). In 2010, the University Conference UNIKO formed the “Task Force Gender and Diversity” of which objectives are to ensure gender quality in everyday university life and to promote and utilize diversity in personnel area and an Office of Gender and Diversity management was established within the BMFWF.

In the University Report of 2014, the BMFWF emphasizes social and ethnic origin in connection with the question of access to higher education. It is underscored that diversity strategies should achieve a balanced representation of university students and academic staff based on socio-economic and educational background features. At this point, three underlying criteria are envisaged: educational equity, gender equality and utilization of the potential (BMFWF, 2014, p. 245).

In this sense, the Austrian Universities Development Plan 2016-2021 (BMFWF, 2015) can be considered as a point of reference for diversity management activities of universities. The Plan lays down eight system targets. The System Target 8 sets forth “promoting a cultural change in favor of social inclusion, gender equality and diversity at the University”. Three main implementation objectives in meeting this target are set out; a) achieving a balanced gender representation, b) establishing a diversity culture at universities, and c) converging the composition of students and graduates to those of the total population in terms of the level of education (p.28-30). Concrete measures for social inclusion and diversity comprise such actions as development

of university diversity strategies, producing various reports in addition to Student Social Survey, embedding equality plans into university statutes and developing measures to promote the reconciliation of work / study and private life (p. 29). The targets set in the development plan demonstrate the policy goal of embedding diversity management into the corporate policy and practices of HEIs.

Secondly, "*National Strategy on the social dimension in higher education - for a more inclusive access and wider participation* " was started to be prepared in collaboration with universities, relevant stakeholders and interest groups. The main purpose is that "socio-economic standing, regional differences or the family situation should not be a consideration or obstacle in entering higher education". (IC 201)

The strategy development process covers the following stages of ; analyzing the existing situation based on existing studies and recommendations such as Student Social Survey, EUROSTUDENT or recommendations of the Higher Education Conference, Bologna Ministerial Conference, and existing measures at universities and at the ministerial level; discussion of conclusions, broad involvement of stakeholders and interest groups and development of policy and implementation proposals. The strategy is expected to be completed in 2016 and started to be implemented from 2017 (BMFWF, 2015a, p. 28-31).

As the strategy development process is currently in progress, how underrepresented groups are defined is not known yet. However, as one interviewee from the Ministry puts it, refugee/asylum seeking students may be incorporated into the strategy.

The Ministry is developing a general strategy for the social dimension which includes aspects of easier access for underrepresented groups to higher education. This is a follow-up to the Bologna recommendation that the "*student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations*". This strategy process could also include the special target group refugee/asylum seeker students. Up to now, however, the humanitarian first aid aspect was more important. (IC 201)

Since July 2014, a working group has worked on proposals to promote non-traditional access in the field of HE to enhance social inclusion.

The “Hochschulkonferenz” (advisory group representing the Ministry and Higher Education stakeholders) has recently published recommendations on the access to higher education of non-traditional students, which is also of relevance to refugee and asylum-seeker students.” (IC 201)

In Austrian HE system, the distinction between traditional and non-traditional students is more pronounced than the term underrepresented groups. As Pechar & Wroblewski (2000, p.33) put it, traditional students are regarded as those full-time students who enroll at university right after the completion of secondary school whereas non-traditional students are defined by the characteristics of a) alternative access routes to HE, b) time of entry to HE (delayed), c) part-time studies (due to work or family related matters).

The working group of *Hochschulkonferenz* defines traditional students as all those people who take up studies right after graduation pursuant to prototypical education process. Right after here denotes to taking up studies after *Matura* (secondary-school leaving examination) taking into accounts delays due to community service or a voluntary social year or a year abroad. Prototypical refers to school progress without long-term interruption from the beginning to completion of *Reifeprüfung* (secondary-school leaving examination also known as *Matura*). Non-traditional is therefore all that differs from this linear and consecutive educational progress. The study also categorizes potential students from underrepresented groups with socioeconomic context into three as being, educationally disadvantaged applicant (eg. Migration background), students with care responsibilities and students with disability and/or chronic illnesses (BMFWF, 2015b, p. 12-13).

4.3 Institutional Policies

The section seeks to provide information about the activities that HEIs intend to carry out as part of their diversity management and WP strategies by analyzing performance agreements. Performance agreements are primary means by which Austrian HE institutions formally articulate their goals which they seek to achieve in a given time period. Hence, they are major sources of information for institutional aims and projects along with strategies to meet societal challenges in an increasingly diverse society. For the performance agreement period 2016-2018, all performance agreements of the universities had a section titled "*Internationalisation/Responsible Science/Gender Equality und Diversity Management*" and the universities were envisaged to develop an active diversity management system in the medium term.

Analysis of performance agreements of the 22 public universities in Austria reveal that that disadvantaged groups are most often defined by gender or disability. All universities have specific policies and actions pertaining to gender and disabled employees and students. Addressed under themes of gender mainstreaming, gender equality and barrier-free education, actions taken for that purpose vary from advancement of women academicians, increasing the proportion of women in scientific positions, ensuring equal pay, gender-budgeting, encouraging women in science, establishment of institutes for gender and equality to improving conditions for disabled students and employees. There is no common composition of under-represented groups targeted across all universities. Whilst all universities pay particular attention to gender and disability, a few universities define other cultural and demographic groups. No university make specific mention of refugees as belonging to underrepresented or underprivileged groups. Nevertheless, activities directed at underprivileged groups or students with a migrant background which is a commonly used term in the agreements relate to refugees as well. Four universities incorporate students with migrant backgrounds/ethnic minorities to underrepresented/underprivileged or socially disadvantaged groups when defining the scope of these groups. One university declares developing and implementing sociopolitical actions and projects - in particular those related to anti-racism, migration and asylum and the problem of third countries problems as its responsibility.

Notwithstanding a lack of all-encompassing scope of underrepresented groups in performance agreements, some if not all universities address underrepresented/ underprivileged or socially disadvantaged groups. Goals and actions taken by universities in terms of diversity management will be analyzed under categories of development of diversity plans, outreach, research, internationalization, support&integration mechanisms.

Diversity plans

Three most commonly referred plans for increasing diversity of students were preparation of diversity management strategies, increasing cooperation with schools and information campaigns. Whereas most universities state their intention to develop a diversity management strategy, only one university mentions a specific project directed at increasing the share of students and graduates with a migration background and increasing social mobility for students from

underprivileged backgrounds. The actions to be taken for that purpose cover creating the background for data and determining measures for implementation. Data on student backgrounds is planned to be collected through university-wide survey which would allow the target group to be determined and continuing monitoring of these groups through this database is to be ensured. Finally, corresponding measures are planned to be monitored (University of Vienna, 2016, p. 9).

Outreach

Most widening participation work mentioned by universities are in the form of cooperating with schools at the pre-entry stage. While few universities target increasing the number of students with migration background, some address socially disadvantaged groups in general. Whilst some universities opt for school visits, some mention offering mentoring schemes, where university voluntary students come together with pupils from migration background to inspire them to study. A notable example is a mentoring scheme for first generation students who are the first from their family and wish to study or already study at a university. Other *first generation students* volunteer as mentors offering pre-entry and post-entry support, share their personal experiences and possible challenges they may encounter as the first student in their family to study or as a student with a migrant background (University of Graz, 2016, p. 9). In another instance, exchange between students and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds suffering from poverty and social inclusion is promoted to enhance learning and social inclusion, the ultimate aim of which is to support children and young people to have access to university (Vienna University of Economics&Business, 2016 p. 3).

Some outreach activities presented similarities across all higher education institutions such as school visits, open days or open door days, taster courses known as *studierenprobieren*, where prospective students visit some classes with the company of students to ask questions and be informed about university life and classes. The range of specific activities covers information sessions on admission, public information campaigns, distribution of brochures to schools. To give an example, “The Academy Goes to School” project aims to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have easy access to art education through activities that provide information on studying at an art school alongside the implementation of structures that enable these studies (Academy of Fine Arts, 2016, p.6). In another case, cooperation with autonomous center for migrants will be established to assist migrants in entrance examination (University of

Arts&Design Linz, 2016, p.21). Aside from young people, kids from disadvantaged backgrounds were targeted. *Kinderuni* aimed at reaching particularly kids from educationally disadvantaged or migrant backgrounds in the city or in the countryside (University of Salzburg, 2016, p.12).

Research

It could be seen that societal changes are addressed in many research clusters of universities. Some universities specify their research priorities along the lines of recent social developments. Relevant topics of research specified in performance agreements pertain to such themes as identity, migration, citizenship, democratic citizenship, community and participation, inequalities in distribution of wealth, income and education, individuality, diversity, interculturality, multilingualism, demographic changes, inclusion, lifelong learning, education and training of educators and teachers. Yet, the list is not exhaustive as many universities fit in numerous other aspects of societal challenges revolving around issues of migration, ethnicity, asylum into their research agenda and conduct national and international projects.

Internationalization

Aligning diversity and widening participation activities with internationalization activities seems to have remained scarce attention in performance agreements. Only one university laid special emphasis on increasing international mobility of students with special needs, migrant background or from ethnic minorities (University of Salzburg, 2016, p.8). However, other activities falling under the category of internationalization could be deemed as indirectly benefiting refugee students such as expanding the culture of welcome and buddy system, establishment of welcome centers as the first contact point for applicants and students and offering intercultural training for incoming and outgoing academicians and students.

Support&Integration

Some universities mention offering support to students at the post-entry stage. One such support is academic writing centers. One university specifically address target groups of undergraduate students from underprivileged and migration backgrounds to support for academic writing (University of Vienna, 2016, p.70). To illustrate, “*Mentoring for Writing*” could be cited as an example, where writing mentors form groups to ponder upon strategies to deal with academic

texts and peer-feedback is provided. Writing mentors from the MA program German as a foreign and second language support students whose first language with uncertainties when dealing with German as a language of science (<https://ctl.univie.ac.at/qualitaetsentwicklung-von-studien/schreibmentoring-schreibwerkstaetten/schreibmentoring/>). Another example is *Academic Writing Center* (University of Graz, 2016, p.8) where workshops and counseling on academic writing are offered to students to convey writing strategies and techniques, initiate exchanges and dialogue on writing. Students can obtain information in peer-to-peer setting either with student writing tutors or work as advanced writers in individual coaching to further develop their academic writing skills (<http://lehr-studienservices.uni-graz.at/de/studienservices/schreibzentrum/>). Other centralised student support services referred in performance agreements were related to the disability service, careers guidance, study support and counselling services. One such example of offering assistance comes from the Research and Consulting center for Victims of Violence (Aspis) within the Institute of Psychology at University of Klagenfurt which will be offering help for refugees (University of Klagenfurt, 2016, p.52).

Whilst this section has centered around policies and strategies at the national and institutional level on diversity management and widening participation which are of direct or indirect relevance to refugee students, the following section analyzes concrete steps towards integrating refugee students into higher education.

MORE Initiative

A nationwide university-led initiative called MORE for refugee students were launched and led by Universities Austria. The rationale behind the initiative is that talents, skills, and knowledge of refugees should be harnessed and could be of great contribution to their host societies. The program started in September 2015 with participation and contribution of public universities to varying degrees. In winter semester 2015-2016, there were 663 MORE students, 342 of whom were registered at the University of Salzburg, 82 at the University of Graz, 77 at the University of Klagenfurt and 53 at the University of Linz. (APA, 2016) and last summer semester around 1,100 students enrolled for the MORE courses.

The MORE program is open to individuals who hold the status of asylum-seeker with a residence entitlement card, recognised refugees, people who have subsidiary protection and people who have temporary leave to remain. The aim of the MORE is to enable refugees to familiarize

themselves with Austrian higher education and equip them with German language skills, and facilitate their access to higher education (Uniko, n.d).

As put by one interviewee,

The idea is basically to include the refugees and asylum seeker students into the university system to give them an overview and a way to get orientation, some kind of a bridging course, that is what those different universities offer, that these students can try out different courses, to find out if studying is an option or if is not an option, so it has a bridging orientation, information, like sort of that's the goal... It is a help for also to gain language competences, competences actually needed for studying obviously for most study programs in Austria require a level of German which is quite good, which obviously refugees don't have because they didn't plan to move to Austria". (IC 202)

It does so by offering them non-bureaucratic enrollment as non-degree students to take up individual academic and artistic seminars or courses either designed solely for them or as part of other degree programs. Universities allocate free places for refugee students in these classes where the medium of instruction is either German or English. Apart from academic courses, refugees can join language classes based on the quotas available at each university. For some classes, student may take exams at the end of the course. Then students are granted a transcript. For students who do not take exam, a certificate of attendance is given. Courses in the MORE program cannot be transferred to degree studies or qualify refugees as degree students. If they wish to become degree students, then they have to undergo regular admission processes of the university. The program also offers waiver of tuition fees and membership fee for the Austrian Student Union which is covered by the student union and an access to university library services. Based on availability, support for travel expenses and teaching materials could be provided. The program could be supported through donations which are used to fund books and tickets to travel to the university or university courses about language, arts or sports for an entire semester. Further, the program offers a mentoring scheme called Buddy System for swift integration of students to university and daily life (UNIKO, n.d).

Initiatives within the scope of MORE Project mostly started from bottom-up where individual departments, people and students felt it as part of their social responsibility to assist

refugees. Rather than starting top-down initiatives in a structured manner, universities interviewed opted for supporting these bottom up initiatives. As previously alluded to, refugees were not yet part of the diversity strategy projects and initiatives were started with humanitarian motives.

Diversity strategy, we started thinking about last year, we started with a start-up workshop and we decided that the first topic in our diversity project that we wanted to work with is disabled persons. The first two categories I think it will be migrants and social inclusion. Refugees were not a topic; it was too early for that (IC 206).

I would say it started with the humanitarian aspect. Many people at university, we have about 4000 employees who are still active in engaging themselves for humanitarian projects and giving language classes and things like that. Our strategy is to combine this engagement with the main tasks of the university. So we try to arrange the projects in a way that students for example working or giving lectures would get ECTS points for that that they have insurance when they work outside the university that is part of their curriculum. That I would say is the main strategy. People getting involved in the name of the university I would say also work in the framework of the institution. Of course we cannot cover everything people are doing it in their spare time I mean people may engage themselves a lot more (IC 205).

Given the background of the MORE program, the following section provides information on admission to HE in Austria, describes how refugees accessed MORE initiative, information on admission and university and presents issues surrounding admission of refugees.

4.4 Admission

There are different ways to qualify for university study in Austria. The most important is through the secondary school leaving examination known as *Matura*, which is officially known as the *Reifeprüfung*. Being an open access system, all students with Matura are eligible to study in their choice of study program at public universities. On that note, a government bill in 2013 introduced extra entrance examinations for some popular study programs such as medicine, dentistry, psychology, biology, business administration and communication science. In Austrian

education system, students are tracked into general secondary schools or academic secondary schools depending on their achievements at the end of primary school. Since the selection for the route to HE takes place early on, no further testing is required at the point of HE access. As the system is open access there has traditionally been no policy of reserving special quotas for disadvantaged students.

To be able to be admitted to a degree program, Austrian universities require a) the general university entrance qualification (*allgemeine Universitätsreife*); b) the specific university entrance qualification (*besondere Universitätsreife*) for the chosen study course; c) knowledge of the German language. In the case of art studies, an admission examination is administered as proof of the artistic aptitude whereas few studies ask for secondary school-leaving examination. For admission to sports science studies or physical education programs, proof of aptitude for physical/motor skills is required (Universities Act, 2012, p.59). For international students, a foreign certificate of which equivalency is determined by a) an agreement under international law, b) a nostrification, c) a decision taken by the rectorate on a case-by-case basis (Kasparovsky, 2015, p.23). Whilst the rectorate remains responsible for all decisions on admission, the senate has the right to announce restrictions on the admission of foreign students and stateless applicants in the case of unacceptable conditions due to excessive number of students. However, EU and EEA citizens, refugees or applicants under a mobility program, are exempt from such regulations (Universities Act, 2002, p.60).

From the university side, except for four universities, all the other 18 universities announced the MORE initiative, their course offerings on the MORE program or admission requirements for refugee students on their webpages. Whereas information was provided in English language, two universities provided information in German language. Among them, one published information leaflet in English. Out of 21 universities, three universities published information leaflets in other languages; one in Arabic, the other one in Arabic and Farsi. On website of one university, it was stated that they were working on providing translations of offerings and refugee-related events in Arabic and Farsi. However, on some universities' and student union's websites, information on general admission conditions and other relevant information can be found in other languages such as Russian, Arabic or Turkish and some student unions provides assistance in various languages other than English and German. Most universities

collaborated with student unions. In some cases, student unions published the MORE program or other event offerings on their webpages or Facebook.

Concerning receiving information, advice or guidance on HE opportunities in Austria, all students stated that it was through their personal efforts and help of various NGOs and support workers, some of whom were dedicated to education that they had reached information. They resorted to a variety of sources such as NGOs; i.e Caritas, Interfax, Integration, Menschen, friends, internet, and universities. Most of them opted for visiting the universities, attending open days and sending e-mails to be informed on courses and study programs. In some cases, friends were helpful during the application process. Students' perception on the pre-entry guidance on accessing HE varied. While some were satisfied with what was offered to them by NGOs, others felt they needed more guidance.

If you searched enough you'll find good results but you need to be directed. How can I go there? There are a lot of NGOs to help you in this. (IC 212)

Not really, there was not a lot of help about that unless you were trying to get information on your own. That's why I went to two universities. I went to get information; I also went to an organization called Interface. It helps refugees so I went there and I asked them questions and they gave me answers. There was an open day for refugees, for foreigners who want to continue their study in Austria, and I went there and they answered my questions. (IC 214)

No no, no information but in Caritas yeah the last time I went there they told me if I wanted to study or something like that., They gave me papers about which universities I can go. They asked me what I studied in Syria. I told them and they asked me if I wanted to complete or study another thing and they made copy of some papers and they gave it to me". (IC 213)

It's more like a friend of mine, she just saw that there is an opportunity for asylum seeker and refugee students to study as listeners, or learning the German at the university so I just visited the website, it was in English or so I just made it by myself. (IC 207)

For refugees, specific support is also needed both before enrollment or during the application process. Before enrollment, students need advice on study programs to inform their choices and the systems with which they are unfamiliar.

They need information about the registration procedure because most of them can't speak German well. The procedure is very complex especially for those who have never been at a university. At the beginning the lack of information was the biggest issue because the refugees didn't know how to apply. It was a big effort to provide them all information they need because the resources of the students counselling centre and ... (*gives the name of the student initiative*) is quite limited. (IC 217)

When it comes to applying for courses, support mechanisms included pastoral support through the assignment of a personal tutor as in the case of *Buddies* in the MORE program, one-to-one support from admission offices or student unions/counselling centers.

Most NGOs now know how to contact us, so they come to my Secretary, we make an appointment and we talk in person. I always make appointment with them, they bring their documents and I talk with them so that's the easiest way. We kind of see what their interest are. Are they really interested to study? Because they are some who are just seeking for German course and we can't offer German courses (IC 218).

In the students counselling center, we offer them to do the registration together and give them advices how to go on to become a student. The students counselling center is a kind of a first contact point and in cases of troubles with the university we communicate directly with the staff members of the university. (IC 217)

Without adequate information, it could be difficult for refugees and asylum seekers to know which course to apply. It was clear that refugees needed guidance on selecting the appropriate course. Some interviewees gained this support from universities as most of them formed special units in admission offices, student unions or international offices for supporting refugees and asylum seekers during admission.

They don't know if they want to study here. They want to study arts and we are not the university for that. (IC, 218)

It's our student's student union, support service, they have to go to my contact from a student, and again I would call it a clearing face, they speak about what they did in the country, from where he or she had come, to have a look, to look what he really needs. Is it a German or English course, most of them German course, what study will be best for him, because for example many people come to us and they tell us, I want to study Informatics, and it isn't Informatics, what he studied in his country, it was Elektrotechnik or they want to study architecture but it isn't architecture but it's Bauingenieur, we speak with them, what did you study there and what is it comparable with our study? (IC, 206)

In gaining access to HE, language constitutes the major challenge, which was revealed by all participants.

The language is problem yeah because you know here Austrian people when they are studying at university, it's easy for them. For me it's hard because I don't speak, and even if I speak it's gonna be hard for me but I'll pass that because I am excited to study, I came here to study not to, I will study first and then I will go on with what to do with my study. (IC, 213)

The first problem will be of course language. I will have some challenges because I will study in German. I already started studying German but when you're studying something really specialized like engineering, you have to well know with the language. So I'm afraid of this problem." (IC, 214)

While admission conditions for enrolling as irregular students has been facilitated by the MORE program, bureaucracy is relaxed for admission to non-degree studies from the aspect of recognition of foreign qualifications. For some students lack of documents constituted a problem.

The University does not ask for academic documents to join the "MORE-Initiative". So that wasn't a problem because all MORE-Students are irregular students which means they never get an academic degree nor can do exams but at least the access to the services of the university like the library, sports course, IT-services and lectures. If they are interested to

become a regular student, they need to prove that have the right qualification. For some refugees this was a problem because they can't provide that kind of documents. (IC 217)

So if you are a refugee student, it is the same you are not treated differently, so all refugee students can attend courses or enroll at the courses at the university if they know German or if they know English, and have the formal rights to enroll. There is one point where we are not that strict, this is when they cannot show us the document and they say they cannot prove that I have already bachelor's degree, and we are more open in this area. (IC, 205)

4.5 Recognition of Formal Foreign Qualifications

Lisbon Convention of 1997 on the international recognition of qualifications concerning higher education constitutes the core regulatory document for recognition of foreign qualifications in the European region which was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO. Regarding refugees' qualifications and access to higher education and employment, the Section VII, Article VII of the Convention (Council of Europe, 1997) sets forth that procedures must be designed to

assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programs or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

With a view to assist admission officers in HEIs and credential evaluators in pursuing fair and transparent recognition procedure in line with the LRC, the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions (EAR HE Nuffic, 2016) were published. The Manual acts as a guideline and offers recommendations mainly on academic recognition for having access to HE. The Chapter 12 of the Manual centers on refugees with specific emphasis on cases of insufficient or no documentation. To facilitate the process of evaluation in such cases, preparation of background paper is suggested. The "background paper" describes academic achievements of the applicant based on a) detailed information provided by the applicant on his/her previous academic

background, b) all the available documents and evidence provided by the applicant, c) general knowledge of on the education system in the given country (p.130-131). The applicant's qualifications are based on background paper; however, when necessary, special exams, interviews with staff and sworn statements might be arranged.

Secondary school leaving certificates are recognized for admission to Austrian HEIs. The secondary school leaving certificate covers all foreign certificates or diplomas which entitles an applicant to start studies at a HEI. Such certificates comprise diplomas qualifying for admission to HE, final certificates on state examinations, leaving certificates by European Schools, the International Baccalaureate and special University entrance qualification examinations (Studienberechtigungsprüfungen). For university admissions the competent authority to recognize a leaving certificate is the Rectorate. Recognition can be obtained in one of the three ways depending on the respective case through (1) validation (nostrification) of secondary, (2) equivalence based on multilateral//bilateral agreements, (3) Equivalence based on a decision of the higher education institution. Nostrification refers to recognition of a foreign university degree as equivalent to an Austrian one and provides an Austrian academic title. Through bilateral/multilateral agreements between Austria and many other countries, equivalence of secondary-school leaving certificates are regulated. Hence, certificates issued by the party states grant the applicant a general entry qualification. Finally, in all the other cases equivalence is decided by individual universities on a case by case basis. However, additional examinations may be required. When an Austrian academic degree is required for practice of professional activity, applicants may apply to universities for *nostrifizierung* of the foreign academic degree for regulated professions such as medical doctor, lawyer or teaching professions. Applicants may be required to pass additional exams for *nostrifizierung* (Kasparovsky, 2015, p.29).

In Austrian HE system, since the universities are autonomous, they design their own curricula and handle recognition issues independently. The law provides a framework and guides appropriate decisions. The Federal Ministry of Science, Research and Economy and ENIC-NARIC AUSTRIA (National Recognition Information Center) supports HEIs with reliable information about HE systems of other countries (Kasparovsky, 2015 p. 70).

What we're doing as an ERIC-NARIC is to try to give, to analyze foreign HE systems, maybe we take one system of Syria, Afghanistan whatever, analyze it for us according to our information, also in contact with other NARICs to give recommendations to the universities. You'll find a lot of recommendations on our web-page ENIC-NARIC of general nature, there we covered questions which are occurring there every month, every week or so, we try to bring in general recommendations so university can copy this and decide always in line with this. They have obligation for equal treatment but it happens according to rules. And if they decide to stick to our recommendations then we accept this for a rule and the it's ok, and there remain our recommendations. At least we recommend, the binding decision is by the universities whether they copy-paste our recommendations, decisions or they make their own (IC 202).

With the rapid increase in number of refugees seeking asylum and employment afterwards, applications for ENIC-NARIC Austria for recognition of foreign documents have increased substantially.

At first we have a lot of applications, we have an increase of applications, if I may tell you an example in 2010 we had about 1500 assessment per year, now in 2015 it was about 5000, it means from 1500 to 5000 is the increase. It means the disadvantage is that people have to wait longer. Formally they received the letter within some days. Now we tell it by automatic generated e-mail maybe you have to wait for 4 to 5 weeks, sorry 4 to 8 weeks. Mostly it's possible within a month, but under certain circumstances, if I have only a term by another authority, please do it again anticipated but not for everybody. This is our long-term problem but in general we're trying to serve for everybody, not to include hindrances in this process. (IC 202)

To be able to shorten application time, ENIC-NARIC Austria set up a web-portal, an online application tool called "Recognition Information Application System" (www.aais.at) so that people all over the world can, upload their documents and apply electronically. The system generates an assessment letter in German language. While the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions suggest preparing background document, there are no guidelines yet on preparing a background paper at the national level, as assessment of refugee students' qualifications for admission to HE are done by individual universities depending on the field of

studies and availability of documents that refugee students have (IC, 201). Some students had already legalized their documents before immigration. While all students interviewed stated that they had all their documents with them, admission offices stated that students had at least some documents to prove their studies either as soft or hard copy, original or photocopy.

For regular studies they bring their papers to be admitted to degree programs. First we ask for those documents. Most refugee students have those papers in one way either as paper, or on their mobiles or as pdfs. (IC 208)

While each university has their own mechanisms to deal with missing documents and to determine if a student qualifies for studies, the most commonly referred methods to verify plausibility of students' statements on their studies were supplementary examinations, oral exams, and interview with students. Most universities opted for handling each case individually.

For Syria, we have exemption, they do not have to bring the legalization, they do not have to bring the proof of the special university qualification because it's not possible for them to bring these documents. So that we prove if they are equal, the studies they had in Syria or the secondary studies they completed in and then they give them admission with supplementary examinations. It's always not equal to Austrian school-leaving certificate and also the studies are not equal if they complete the bachelor or master program. (IC 209)

...Sometimes, they only have a copy of their own website from government screen. So, there is the only way for the student department is to talk to them. So, you have to talk to them and ask them exactly what happened, why you can't prove that and you have any other option to prove that you went to a high school and already graduated. So that's done individual, so I can't say when you don't have your high school degree you can't start. So even if they don't have any proof, they can make an oral exam to see if they have the certain knowledge like in mathematics or in physics or so. (IC 218)

If there is no documentation, then the Rectorate has the right to oversee the situation. (IC 208)

Another commonly discussed issue concerning recognition of foreign qualifications concerns authenticity of documents. Findings reveal that while some universities have not encountered any cases of fake document submission, this has become a major concern for some

universities in Vienna. In some cases, students were found to be pretending not to have any documents. Fake documents were stated to be coming both from refugee students and international students.

At our university, we do not take persons without documents and we have no problems because they bring their documents. Firstly, they say, I don't have this and that document, if we say, sorry you cannot study without these documents, then they bring them. I don't know why maybe they try first to get enrolled without documents. Then they see it's not possible, then they bring the documents. And so we have no problem. The students have always brought the correct documents.” (IC 209)

This is a really, really big problem. We have a lot of students sending us fake documents. We had an agreement with *Bundeskriminal Amt* (Federal Criminal Police Office), and if I'm not sure if it's fake or not or from a country, where we know only fake documents come, you cannot get real document there, then I send it to the *Bundeskriminal Amt*, and they do test to see if there are manipulations, or reproductions and I get it back and I can use it to write a negative admission letter because of the fake document. The Austrian law says also the universities have to inform the police about these fake documents, if the people are still abroad and not in the country, we have to do this because, it is really really, really a big problem. (IC 209)

Considering qualifications, rights and opportunities granted by education in terms of immigration, access to employment and further education, detecting fraud and taking measurements against it is significant for HEIs.

Another problem that was mentioned relates to verification of identity of the refugee students.

Of course there are fake documents from refugees we are often sure that they are fake because it's a bit funny because at first they do not have any documents, and one week later they bring these documents we want. Life is already hard enough for them but it's also the problem that many people are from Syria but they are not from Syria. We also have problems with identity of the people. When we are not sure, if we, you really need reason to say I think this is a fake document. It's not ok to say '*this looks like a fake*

document but I cannot see why so’. The Austrian law says you have to have really really good reason to say this is fake and you have to lay down your reasons.” (IC 209)

It could be seen that universities follow the guidelines for internal and external verification of authenticity of documents before taking an undue decision. Procedures adopted for that purpose include benefiting from recommendations of the ENIC-NARIC and Ministry of Science, utilizing existing internal databases or other countries’ databases with similar education systems such as *Anabin*, and checking with issuing institution or the Austrian embassies.

4.6 Language

Language requirement typically features in admission procedures of higher education institutions. Universities usually opt for tests administered by official, credible or well-established bodies. Article 2 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention specifies that no one shall be discriminated against on grounds of language in admission procedures. However, the Article 4.7 asserts that HEIs has the right to ask applicants to demonstrate “sufficient competence in the language or languages of instruction of the institution concerned, or in other specified languages”. (Council of Europe, 1997)

The main language of instruction at Austrian universities is German. Hence, proof of proficiency in German language is conditional for admission to degree programs if this is necessary for successful continuation of studies. While a university entrance qualification obtained in German language tuition can fulfill this requirement, rectorate can propose a supplementary language examination prior to admission. Article 54 para. §12 of the Universities Act allow use of foreign language teaching, examining, writing scientific papers and theses upon agreement with the supervisor. (Universities Act, 2002, p.54-61). German language requirement usually applies to bachelor programs whilst some master’s and research programs may not require German language skills as they (some of them) target international students. In English medium programs, internationally recognized certificates are generally required as proof of language proficiency.

At some universities, applicants without a language certificate may take a language test for German at the university. Otherwise, they need to get a language certificate in Austria or in their

home country. In general, most universities require demonstration of proficiency at a minimum level corresponding to B2 level or at some others to C1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Language certificate requirement of each university vary.

Refugees desiring to qualify for admission to HE can take up language courses from the MORE program offered by the public universities. Apart from the MORE program, *Vorstudienlehrgang* program is open to refugee students as well. Offered by universities in Vienna and Graz, it is designed as university preparation courses for international students. Preparing students for supplementary examinations required by the universities to get a place at the university, the program establishes a solid base in such classes as German as a foreign language, English, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, History or Geography. It usually takes three semesters for a student without any knowledge of German to reach B2 level in the program.

Language poses the major challenge for students from three aspects; access to HE, taking part in social life and joining the labor market. Regarding access to HE, the minimum time span required to have good mastery of language is usually 1 to 1,5 years. While courses offered by the MORE program at each university vary in terms of the exit level within one year, the major problem is related to lack of enough places for language classes since the universities are offering them out of their own funds based on availability of places in each class and willingness of language instructors to have more students. Moreover, not all students have the same opportunity to continue classes in the same program.

The MORE program is not a fixed program as such, every university has it differently, for example, the Orient Academy in Vienna, they started in November and they are aiming to have students ready, so to say ready for real studies by September; hence, or I think, within nine or ten months, they wanna bring them up to B2 level so, the same thing done by University of ... they also started the program, obviously not everybody is that quick in studying, they are traumatized then, it is not so easy to reach that goal but the goal is to for certain students attain that level of competency within a year. So, it is possible but it's hard. However, *Vorstudienlehrgang* in Vienna, they usually say it three semesters if not four semesters, to actually to get to B2 level because the written skills also take a lot of time,

yeah speaking usually goes faster because people also like speak to other people, exposed to the culture so it's of course a goal but it cannot be reached. (IC 203)

Most of them ask for a German course but there is not enough capacity.” (IC 217)

There are unfortunately not enough free places for the German courses because it is just that the thing that universities would need support from the Ministry, it's because basically they are doing it out of their own funds, so obviously limited, free classes offered to them. Yeah, that's a shame, because everybody needs German. (IC 203)

One student considered German putting himself/herself at a disadvantage position in terms of prospective success in the study program as compared to native students.

Yes, the language is problem yeah because you know here Austrian people when they are studying at university, it's easier for them. For me it's hard because I don't speak, and even if I speak it's gonna be hard for me but I'll pass that because I am excited to study, I came here to study. I will study first and then I will go on with what to do with my study.” (IC 213)

Not only was the role of language considered paramount in accessing HE, it was also described as vital in terms of fitting in the host culture and integration.

The biggest challenge is to learn German. Without knowing German, it will be difficult to be part of the society and understand how things work here in Austria. All points you mentioned in your questions are connected with the language. First people must understand each other and then we can manage how we want to live together respecting the needs of the other. (IC 217)

Refugees are constantly desired to integrate into their host societies as swiftly as possible and language mastery is key to integration. In most political discussions, refugees' desire to integrate and learn the language of the host country is heatedly discussed. Yet, whether they are offered adequate language training or chances to interact with the host population remains controversial. As the expert interview puts it;

Yes, one has to admit that why should the university pay for the language course? This is also something that applies general to migration challenges in Austria. Often politicians

come and say migrants should learn proper German, but on the other hand we do not offer enough language courses. Who cares about that? They should. It's a decent requirement. Should they? Yes, they should. But they need help for that. It's also symbolic to ask for something they cannot achieve without language course. How could they? There are very intelligent people who find their way but still in broader range, you won't have it. So the question is as result, the general impression of the public is migrants do not want to learn, which is the next trick. That can happen. But on the other hand, it's easier for a politician to ask what a migrant should do instead to raise money to support them. Normally, it's easier to have claims but what to do, what others should do, then to do something on your own. Often we are trapped in a double bias like that". (IC 211)

Accordingly, one student raised the lack of possibilities to practice German language with native speakers as they currently have little contact with them. Due to lack of language skills, interaction with society through employment remains lacking as well. One interviewee mentioned significance of internships and projects that refugee students can participate in terms of practicing language and networking to find future employment.

They have to make some courses speaking only; conversation. Because if you don't speak the language, you'll not learn it and people here they still have problem with integration. (IC 212)

There is something like a praktikum, internship. I have applied for one at a university, but I was so late so somebody else took it but something like this will help a lot. It was special for refugees. They took 80% refugees who studied economics but something like this, it will be so helpful. It will help you integrate with Arbeitsmarkt (labour market) or universities or studying or everything. They will let you know what you should do. Networks, practicing language, everything. It's through university so you apply in the university and they'll know what they should do with me. They will know my experiences, everything about me, you know. (IC 212)

Another factor that negatively affects language acquisition of refugees relates to legal conditions for asylum procedure. The Austrian government finances language training for people whose refugee status has officially been confirmed. During the waiting period, asylum seekers are

not entitled to receive funds for language study. On that note, MORE program offers opportunities for asylum seekers to take up language studies.

People are depressed here, so they will wait about one year and they will also wait to get language course, not all people are like me, they will wait AMS to send them to the course and sometimes they will let you wait about three months or four months. (IC 212)

For the refugees once they are recognized refugees, they get funds from Integrationsfund, there are some subsidies to take German courses or you get the AMS courses, you do get help in studying German courses but for those in the process and that does takes a lot of time, it is sort of a loss of time. (IC 203)

They should wait till they receive *bescheid* (official decision about one's asylum application in writing) and then they'll start the language. I haven't waited. I went to this institute and I told them I don't have money, I need to study language, I don't want to wait till I get the *bescheid*. They sent me to OIF, OIF means Österreichischer Integrations Fund to get the fund from but also OIF will not fund me until I receive *bescheid*, so I went back to this institute and I told them I couldn't have the fund, so they gave me gratis, kostenlos, free German course A2. I finished A2, I was like a good student, they gave me also B1 gratis. So if I went to MORE Program, it would be so easy for me but I didn't go. (IC 212)

The more the decision of asylum prolongs, the more asylum seekers are deprived of quality language education. In the absence of quality language provision during waiting time, students resort to self-study, private courses or courses offered by NGOs.

Because I got super super-fast course, it was only for 5 weeks and the book was really thick and the teacher had to be so fast and I feel it should be longer for example, in AMS they teach the same book but the course time is 3 months but I took it only in 5 weeks so there is a huge difference. (IC 214)

It's better to go to the Vorstudienlehrgang because this is a really German course and explanation very high quality to learn fast, because you have many many courses per week, drill you to learn German so normally it takes 2-3 semesters to learn German and start with the degree program. It's not very cheap, I know but it's still cheaper than other courses, you have many lessons in this course, the other institutions offer maybe, prices cheaper but

do not have this many lessons and quality, it's good to invest this many, I know it's hard for refugees but they have these possibilities to learn or to go somewhere else, come back and talk in German to us.” (IC 209)

Another finding related to language was that some well-known language certificates from some well-credited language institutions were not accepted by some universities due to forgery of these tests and quality not matching the standards of the institutions. Some universities waive the requirement to prove language proficiency by test results when students demonstrate language proficiency at admission offices. In that case, students are asked either to take an oral test or a test administered by the international office or other relevant units of the university.

But the quality is not also so good. It depends also on the countries; we cannot really prove the quality. We have students coming with certificates from these institutions, but they cannot speak German. And so at our university we decided not to accept it in the application process, because we do not see the people, we cannot speak to the people, we cannot prove they really speak German or not, we also get a lot of fake documents and we cannot accept these. But when they come to the counter, they speak German, and ok that's enough, go and start your bachelor programs.

We only accept 4 certificates, if they do not have these, you get the admission letter with supplementary examinations in German. And when they come to the counter, they speak German to my team members, they say ok, this person has good knowledge in German, but we do not know if it is really B2. We can't. We do not have the capacity to prove this. We send them to international office, she checks and does B2 test with the students and she says yes, that's B2, and they come back with the certificate and they get enrolled. They do not have to go to Vorstudienlehrgang. (IC 209).

4.7 Financial Support

Public higher education institutions in Austria charge no fees from Austrian and EU students. However, a small fee of around 18 Euros is compulsory for the student union. If one exceeds the study period program by more than two semesters, (the duration of compulsory military or community service is exempt), 363.36 EUR per semester is compulsory. Students from outside Europe pay 726.72 EUR per semester and a fee of ca. 18 EUR per semester to the Student Union (Kasparovsky, 2015, p.30). Degree students who are Austrian nationals, EU or European Economic Area (EEA) nationals third-country nationals or stateless persons holding the same rights as residents regarding the access to occupation, or convention refugees are entitled to receive study grants. Student grants are allocated on social criteria basis by taking into account social need, academic success, income, marital status and family size (Austrian Study Grant Authority, 2015, p. 8-24)

The major challenge for refugee students concerns how they are going to support themselves financially while studying. As they go through various stages of asylum process, their entitlements to financial aid vary as well. Asylum seekers are not entitled to receive income, family allowance or childcare allowance until they are granted the status of recognized refugee. Likewise, they are entitled to student grants once they receive the status of recognized refugee. They have full access to Austrian labor market and receive the same benefits as Austrians. In this need-based minimum benefit system known as *mindestsicherung*, single people receive around 837.76 Euro. Hence, when refugees start higher education, they may apply for study grants but are generally not entitled to receive the *mindestsicherung*. The same rule applies to Austrian students as well. Further, MORE-Students are not eligible for study grants because they are irregular students who only have access to the university individual courses but do not study in a program.

Findings reveal that along with language, financial concerns constitute the second major challenge for refugee students. Speaking of their satisfaction with their current financial state under social benefits, refugees stated their concerns about financing their studies while studying.

Aha, this is a big problem if you start studying here, the *Sozial* will cut off your money. Yeah, this is my problem now, you know, I hear like there is scholarships, like someone will fund you till like 500 euro per month and other NGO would give 300, so it would be equal to *Sozial* but you need to search, to dig for it.” (IC 212)

Some students stressed that it would be unfair to Austrian students and the government if they both received money and studied.

It will not be fair on the Austrian government. If I want to study and they will pay money, it's so heavy on the system so I need to find other ways to study and work like you know *teilzeit* (part-time), because you know students do not need that much of money. (IC 212)

If I tell you I want money, it's not good because here in Austria people are studying and working. I want to be like them, I want to be the same, I don't want to be more, better than the people, I want to be the same so I don't need anything, I don't know, I don't know what I need, when I start studying I'll know because I didn't start. (IC 213)

Most students did not know how to finance themselves while studying. Scholarships and part-time jobs were most commonly mentioned as ways to finance their studies.

I think I'll try to find a scholarship, if not then I'll try to find a part-time job. Actually I don't have an idea now, I'll search online, I will try to look what universities are, have er mm, scholarships, I will try my best. (IC 213)

Yet, another pertinent issue that comes up with working while studying is the lack of language skills.

If the money is not enough, for sure I will work. If there is some working without language, it's ok yeah but they will cut the money off from Sozial. But I prefer to finish language to study German language and after that I can study. (IC 214)

But to work you have to learn language. I think it's a very normal problem, it's a very normal problem, general problems. (IC 212)

Aside from the issue of costs that may incur while studying, some interviewees mentioned lack of funds for meeting some very basic needs of refugees such as transportation, stationery, costs of study materials and drew attention to meeting these needs along with addressing study costs. Travel costs was a significant problem that two interviewees spoke about.

Most of them also don't live in the cities, so they live somewhere in the countryside. Universities gave subsidies and they also gave help, *Gemeinden* like the local municipalities help them like financing just the trips to the universities because it does just

get very expensive if you just come by public transportation. That is in my opinion the biggest challenge in my opinion for people who want to study in class and who live in one and half-hour away, they do have the time but they don't have the money to also then it's winter. These are like more day-to-day problems, I think more than what a university does, which is just a part of the many problems that refugees have, but this is important.” (IC 203)

For example, a big issue is transportation, so they can't use the public transportation system because they have to pay for it and they have to pay the full price. For example, if you want to study here, and you're living here in Vienna, you have to pay 50 euros per month to travel because when you start a lecture here, if it's held every day so you have to travel from home to the university every day. So you have to get a monthly ticket or a weekly ticket or within the MORE program. Student ticket is 75 euros per semester but they cannot seek for that because they are not actual full-time students so this is one big problem. (IC 218)

Funding not only is a major problem for students but HEIs as well. Funding from policy side to universities in coping with challenges remains scarce. The universities offer language classes to refugees in the MORE program out of their own funds. Particularly vulnerable are asylum seekers who are in a disadvantageous position as they are not entitled to any funds. As one senior administrator summarizes;

One is the financial issue of course, the universities in Austria have a global budget which is meant for fulfilling our goals, but to a very limited extent, we can use this money for humanitarian aid, for language courses lower than the university level. I see that the biggest gap we have here in Austria and I'm quite sure in other countries in Europe as well is in the period when people come to the country until they can get an asylum status. That's where we tried especially after summer fast and flexible to offer possibility to take part in language courses in university classes and courses generally but we cannot get sufficient support money for that period because the funding system in Austria is mainly for people having reached already the asylum status and beginning to integrate in the country. So we cannot take over an important part of integration or humanitarian aid that the Federal Republic does not offer, that's an issue of course. (IC 205)

As put by another interviewee;

They don't care and I think they have the possibility to give us money to serve refugees at the universities. Because the universities are autonomous so they have to care for themselves. The ministry is only watching if the universities are doing right and respect the Austrian law and to give us some money. I don't know they never try to do anything during the refugee crisis. (IC 209)

On that note one student emphasized as well that the MORE Initiative came from the universities not the government per se (IC 212).

Integration into the University/Austria

Austrian universities designed mentoring program MORE Buddy system within the MORE program that bring together students and refugees for support, guidance, language training and mutual learning. Each refugee student is given a buddy that assists them with daily life issues, facilitates their access to the university and integration to the universities and society. Aside from the MORE Buddy system, many universities and students have taken steps to help refugees' integration through such initiatives as opening up internship positions at the university solely for refugees with the support of private sector, offering free German courses, providing mentors speaking native languages of refugees, going on excursions with refugees to introduce them to Austrian geography, cooking activities to exchange culinary tastes of different cultures, designation special contact people to offer universities' expertise for advice on legal or psychological issues, starting to study, psychological problems as well as accommodation and free time activities. Many of the student activities are voluntary and are not funded by universities or any other institution. In one such example of an independent student initiative, refugees are given an opportunity to have contact with local students in an informal context.

We created three projects to facilitate integration of refugees. The main goal is to assist them with issues of daily life and of education. We consider that integration is only successful if people get in touch with the locals, understand their language and culture and know the city. So the refugees become more independent and can be part of the society. Our ideas were to take that in mind and prepare the individual projects for their needs. The first project is a German conversation course. Students who has experiences to teach

German offer classes to refugees. The second one is the “Buddy program” which connects students with refugees. So they have the opportunity to have contact with local students in an informal context. The buddies help them with any kind of question or try to find the right contact to solve their problems. The exchange helps us to find out what they need currently and it is a good feedback for us to know how to improve our service. The last one is our city walk. We guide them through the city and show the most important spots for refugees, e.g. NGO’s, public services, culture and educational institutions, sports locations etc. (IC 217)

Students interviewed think that integration into the university will not constitute a problem for them, and expressed their contentment with the activities offered by them by universities, MORE program and students designed to this end.

No, I have Austrian friends, it’s not hard to get any friends. (IC 213)

Actually I think it’s enough, what else can they (universities) do? What I find here is all of the people are nice and open, you’re always welcome (IC 207)

The conditions are very good (MORE Program), very comfortable. I think people are so happy. (IC 212)

While one student who stayed 3 years in a Muslim country before migrating to Austria mentions difficulty of integration into the society due to cultural differences between the home and the host society, one of them considers delays in recognition of qualifications to enter the labor market as hindrance against swift integration into the Austrian society.

There it’s so easy to integrate with people because we have the same culture but here it’s so different, so integration is one big problem facing this country now. (IC 212)

It was found out that students interviewed do not consider differences between educational systems as a major challenge. Only one student thought the difference between the two systems to

be challenging. Comparing the two systems, they tend to have positive perception of the Austrian HE system in terms of fairness, compliance with the law and quality of education.

The first thing is more like the war destroyed us, then the language problem, after the language, the HE system. We don't have the same system back home. Here it's more open, a bit easier than my country but for us it's hard because it's something new for us. (IC, 216)

I think the problem in our country is, there is no law in university also because our professors might give you minus, even though if you write positive. So I don't have a problem with this here. If you write good, they will give you notes, if you didn't they will fail you. So, this is a very good point here. So, if you study you'll get pass, if you don't you'll fail. I think everything is positive, universities, education system, they stick with the law, so there is not sneaking around. (IC 212)

...because in my country the university is not good. I mean when I was in there, I studied English language and literature. I never spoke English there. When I came here for first time, I didn't know how to speak English but I know the grammar, I have the vocabulary you know but because I didn't speak there, it's bad so I want to study another program here. (IC 213)

Likewise, one senior administrator mentioned the nature of Austrian HE system as being more open and liberal. While emphasizing that the university has been offering support and guidance for refugees' orientation into the university, and it is ready to provide assistance whenever they see the need from refugees, s/he also mentions that a lot of student engagement is required from the refugees' side as well.

In reality there are only a few people who try to use it from refugee side. Very few people are active, very few people are in touch with Austrian students. Maybe their interest is not that big from both sides (IC 205).

Integrating refugee initiatives into teaching and learning practices

Many universities recognize the efforts of their students' voluntary work through credit bearing courses; hence, students' voluntary experience is incorporated into teaching and learning activities. This took the form of offering some ECTS credits for becoming buddies in the MORE program, counting student voluntary work towards elective courses, or offering internship in refugee communities in collaboration with non-governmental sector or teaching German to refugees and recognizing them as compulsory internship, non-curricular internship or graduate internship projects.

In some cases, students are given preparatory courses and training to develop and enhance their pedagogical or social skills before participating activities. Most universities incorporate refugee related issues into their curriculum either through elective modules or in the form of seminars or workshops. At this point, *Welcome.TU.code* program for asylum seekers developed jointly by the faculty and students at the Faculty of Computer Science at the Vienna University of Technology could be given as an example. The program offers computer courses at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels where participants can learn from scratch on how to use a computer up to basic programming skills. Participants are granted certificates at the end of the course. Initially developed to program simple computer games with the students, the curriculum was adapted and expanded based on prior knowledge of the students. Having designed a regular curriculum in 2015, the program now offers up to 70-80 asylum seekers per week. (<http://www.informatik.tuwien.ac.at/welcomeTUcode>)

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION&CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the thesis research and discuss research findings. A summary of the major results will be described and the objectives of the research and the methodology used to accomplish the analysis will be revisited. Then recommendations will be proposed.

5.1 Discussion

Revisiting the findings, at the national policy level of HE, one could see that recently Austria has been paying more attention to social dimension of HE. The Ministry efforts to lie more emphasis on widening access seems to have gained pace after the Bologna process follow-up requirement that students entering HE should reflect the diversity of the population. This was reflected with the start of the national strategy preparation process for social dimension of HE. Concerning the issue of refugees' access to HE, the position taken by the BMWFW reflects the nature of the relationship between HEIs and the Ministry pursuant to the HE reforms that started at the beginning of the 2000s. As put by a senior administrative at the BMWFW; "The Ministry is responsible for the political framework and strategies, concrete actions fall within the remit of the autonomous universities". From the policy side, for the time being, there is no policy consideration to fund quotas or special places for refugees. Regarding incentivization of HEIs for including more refugees, the interviewee from the Ministry mentions the following as ways to support HEIs in their efforts.

Soft incentives and cooperative approach, e.g. by commissioning studies and surveys to analyze the status quo, to fill data gaps, and to identify access barriers, and to include recommendations for remedial measures into the performance agreements with the universities. (IC 201)

It is obvious that almost no financial incentive exists for HEIs to have a strategy for widening access or expand its student body to have more underrepresented groups -except for the prospect of social inclusion to be incentivized through performance agreements- Already full to the brim with the number of students due to open access policy, struggling with retention rates, and funding, and many other societal demands, HEIs expect their efforts be appreciated. As the expert interviewee reflected;

And this also has got to do with also there are no incentives for universities to do something like that. They are overwhelmed, overrun with students, regular students. Apart from moral concerns, why should they care for underrepresented groups but as a university vice-rector or as a university teacher, I would be crazy to invest in that field because I already have enough other students. This generates from demand from my side, study programs and they cannot close the door after 20 students. I have to take whoever comes. (IC 211)

In principle I think things can be done but universities have many different missions to fulfill and complete. A large number of these missions is not rewarded but just an add-on. So you as a university should do this and this and the list to a Santa Claus, the wish list is increasing, for this and that, or third mission or whatsoever, but you don't get anything for that. Maybe a tap on the shoulder "Well-done" but nobody is appreciating this but just raising the demands. This year third mission, next year social inclusion, the year after we have something else. For sure this is like higher education policies are done in Austria, education policy in general. (IC 211)

However, it is evident that Austrian universities have been responsive to the refugee crisis through humanitarian aid and educational support based on availability of their sources as much as they could. The MORE initiative is a singular holistic example of this in Europe. Efforts exerted by individual universities demonstrate their goodwill and responsiveness to societal challenges, which yet suffer from lack of funds. As one student union representative puts it, even small amounts of funding for orientation courses or transportation could help to alleviate the burden on universities.

For example, there was one course we had one or two times, especially for MORE program students about living and life in Austria, the society, how the society worked or so, and how the life in Austria works was a really really great course, it was held one time in 3 hours a week, for 4 or 5 weeks... The government or the Ministry could fund courses like that, this course should not be available only for MORE students, they should be available to all foreign students, because they deal with the same problems and they don't get that help so normally, more things are done by our department for example but they can't deal with our students at here university. This is such a big problem or this is the part where the ministry could help or they can pay them to get the public transportation. (IC 218).

As one senior administrator reflected, universities would be willing to collaborate for initiatives endorsed or launched by the government or ministries on the issue of refugee access and integration into HE.

Concerning the question of Ministry, of the government, there could be more programs for refugees, asylum seekers, further education, the kind of general education where universities can be part of it, but there would have to be a general strategy from Austrian federal government. (IC 204)

Secondly, one could safely argue that refugees and their inclusion are not the main priorities of universities. The reasons for this as mentioned above are partly related to lack of funding for endorsing such activities and partly to more pressing problems that HEIs need to tackle with. Concerning institutional discourse in performance agreements, it is marked that few universities make specific mention of projects directed at underrepresented groups aiming to trace their situation across the whole student cycle. Outreach activities from universities to schools is evident. However, not all activities carried out under the title of outreach target underrepresented groups.

Widening participation necessitates commitment on part of the institutions and should be embedded into the mission and culture of the institution, which in turn entails an institutional change. Most often such transformation is viewed to be damaging academic excellence. As Wolter (2012) remarks "Regrettably adopting lifelong learning structures, opening up for non-traditional

students...have often been eyed suspiciously as detrimental to the achievement of academic excellence (p. 47)” At this point referring back to the frameworks of institutional responses to diversity, the question remains how far the institutions are willing to transform their systems. As one senior administrator addressed the issue;

We have certain level of certain access level we are looking for but we see that people taking part in these language courses are coming from different backgrounds, they have sometimes problems to adapt to our system. And the question is how far do we go for adapting our system? We have changed then exams to some extent where there is less need for example to create own stories which seems to be a culture issue, but of course we cannot go that far that we would contradict our own system and styles”. (IC 205)

Thirdly, the issue of widening access should be evaluated within the broader framework political and social agenda. Many issues inherent in refugees’ access to higher education are closely related with the overall education policy or immigration policy beyond universities’ control such as open access policy, early tracking of students, or asylum law entitling them to certain rights at various stages of asylum processes. Likewise, the issue of refugees per se cannot be considered indispensable of the wider political, social and economic context of the countries. Being a delicate issue across all countries in Europe and elsewhere, immigration of refugees evoked differing responses in the refugee hosting countries, the most common pattern being seen is the surge in support for right-wing parties. The MORE initiative directed at refugees came under scrutiny in Austria by a right-wing political party through parliamentary questions, which in essence questioned the activities in terms of their conformity with the Austrian law and perceived discrimination against Austrian and other third-country and international students. Hence, intricately linked with political and social dynamics, facilitation of access for refugees to HE remain an arduous task.

Regarding the challenges from refugees’ side language, funding, lack of documentation and lack of information constitute the major challenges. Findings are on par with the literature on refugee integration in Austria. In 2013, UNHCR conducted a study on factors influencing integration of refugees in Austria as part of a larger research project. The study revealed similar results in that participants named being language as the prime factor facilitating integration into

the Austrian society. Lack of language proficiency presented obstacles in education, employment, networking, housing, basically all facets of life (UNHCR, 2013, p.109). Waiting period during the asylum procedure and lack of quality courses during this time are cited in the literature as factors unfavorably affecting language learning (Neuwirth and Stolzlechner, as cited in UNHCR, 2013, p.36). As Kraler & Neuwirth put it, self-study due to lack of adequate German courses lead to poor acquisition of language or grammar, which may be hard to correct later. Literature also reveals that refugees most often communicate within their communities or families and do not have opportunities to contact with the host community by means of employment (Stolzlechner as cited in UNHCR, 2013, p. 36). In that respect, language courses are not adequate for sustainable linguistic command as the language learning takes place in social life. Hence, language learning through contact with social life such as workplace gains significance. Secondly, funding presents another major challenge for both refugees and HEIs. For HEIs, as previously alluded to many times, there are no incentives to extend their activities in the field of LLL or WP and indicators for LLL or societal engagement play lesser role in the funding allocations. Lack of sufficient funds for refugees, information on funding opportunities, and entitlement to funding based on legal status of immigration complicate refugees' study chances. Thirdly, although pre-entry guidance was provided by student unions, NGOs and admission offices on admission conditions, funding, study choice and accommodation, there is still need for refugee- and asylum seeker-specific information available on accessing HE, funding, educational opportunities and language courses.

Finally, whilst the refugees having been interviewed within the scope of this study had their official documents for access to HE with them, lack of documents, identity cards and fraud in documentation have been reported to constitute problems for individuals and institutions. The existing literature marks the difficulty of recognition and validation of foreign education and lack of documentation in Austria for refugees. Recognition of foreign degrees was found to be particularly problematic in its relation to employment, de-qualification, professional mobility, non-acceptance of the qualification in the Austrian labor market ((Neuwirth; Kaufmann; Volf, Scheiber; ECRE; Schilcher as cited in UNHCR, 2013, p. 36). However, further studies covering a bigger sample is needed to find out to what extent the issue has become a problem in the Austrian context in terms of refugees' access to HE.

5.2 Conclusion & Recommendations

The purpose of this thesis has been fourfold. On the one hand, it aimed to find out national and institutional policies on refugees' access to HE within the context of Austrian HE system. On the other hand, it attempted to identify the challenges against refugees' access to HE. To be able to do so, the study sought to explore stakeholder views and practices related to refugee students' access to HE and finally aimed to formulate recommendations accordingly. To fulfill these objectives, the study employed interviews and documentary research as data collection tools. In general, in response to the research question and with reference to its sub-questions, it can be concluded that Austrian HE system has been responsive to the massive immigration of refugees and exerted varying degrees of support to them with humanitarian and altruistic motives, yet more sustainable solutions are required. Amidst the political debates, while efforts are being exerted by individual universities and NGOs to meet immediate challenges, funding and support from the policy side remain scarce. Thus, a national action plan for education of refugees is needed.

Recommendations for Policy-making

Recommendation 1: In-depth research targeting both pre-entry or studying refugee students to identify their challenges and needs could be commissioned to have an insight into their living & learning conditions. Recognizing that refugees may have special needs other than international or non-traditional students, policies to support them need to be formulated accordingly.

Recommendation 2: A concerted national action plan for education of refugees could be devised with involvement of various stakeholders from the field of education, policy-making, local authorities, employment office, NGOs and business & industry sectors backed by policy side of HE. Efforts directed towards refugee HE are fragmented. For the time being, activities are carried out by individual institutions rather than holistic policies stretching across all levels of education and addressing the needs of the labor market. Universities' expertise could be utilized for joint projects.

Recommendation 3: Certain fields of study could be prioritized depending on analysis of both needs of the country and labor market and competences and skills refugees have. Hence, short vocational pathways could be an alternative in order for people to get employability skills.

Recommendation 4: Initiatives of HEIs, student unions, students, NGOs and other education providers could be incentivized in their efforts to assist in refugees. Basic needs such as transportation, stationary, books, accommodation or orientation courses offered by universities could be supported through funding or crowdsourcing campaigns.

Recommendation 5: More information, clear and accessible guidance should be provided on asylum seekers' and refugees' entitlements in relation to further and HE. Refugee and asylum seeker-specific advice and guidance sessions, could be offered covering such topics as careers advice, HE entry processes, study programs, course choices, other learning opportunities and university life. Information packages or HE toolkits comprising essential information for asylum seekers and refugees in various languages could be delivered to newly arrived asylum-seekers.

A single web information portal on HE in Austria in various languages including the native languages of refugees providing both general information and issues that solely concern refugees could be set up or such compact information could be provided on one of the existing websites on HE in Austria. One could find a good deal of information about Austrian HE system online yet information is scattered and there is no single website covering all information that a refugee student needs or providing all links related to funding, student financial aid, language course offerings, university preparation program, MORE program, recognition of qualifications and so on.

Recommendations for HEIs

Recommendation 1: HEIs could prepare WP strategy and agenda and establishing strategic committees such as diversity unit or assigning LLL units with the task so that progress of implementation could be monitored. Measurable targets should be set accordingly.

Recommendation 2: HEIs can collaborate with European and other international initiatives. One prominent example is the Kiron Open Higher Education, which is a social start-up from Germany and a crowdsourcing initiative that established a university for refugee students in 2015. Kiron blends online learning with traditional classes. After two years of online learning, students continue their studies in a university with traditional classroom courses. Only then must the students submit the documents normally required for admission to university. Hence, the students are free from bureaucratic concerns or documentation that prevents them from starting their studies. It is free of charge and can be started regardless of legal status or location. The Kiron has supplementary offers such as language courses, career services as well as mentoring and buddy programs. In addition, Kiron gives students access to physical learning centers, so-called study hubs (<https://kiron.ngo/about>). Having fifteen partner universities in total in Europe, the Middle East, West Africa, the United States and Canada, the degree is being recognized by many universities. Currently, the Kiron University is being supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research of Germany (<https://www.bmbf.de/de/bmbf-foerdert-soziales-start-up-kiron-fuer-fluechtlinge-3281.html>).

Recommendation 3: HEIs could align preparatory and bridging classes with the needs of the refugees. As suggested by one interviewee from a student union;

It would be good to have a general study plan with fix courses (e.g. German course, course about Austrian culture and society, etc.) and have a pool with free lectures to choose regarding to their interests (IC, 216).

On that note, the orientation program for international students offered by the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences could serve as an example. While the program aims to have students reach up to B2 level Dutch language, it offers subject-specific preparatory courses such as Mathematics, Economics, Biology, History, Social Studies and Physics. Aside from preparatory courses for Bachelor education, the program offers workshops or courses such as *Bachelor's Level Skills*, *Knowledge of Dutch Society (KNM)*, or *Orientation into the Dutch Labour Market*. The students familiarize themselves with both educational methods used in Dutch HE such as presentations, group work, project-based learning and lectures and culture and labor market of the

Dutch society. Such classes could be added to the *Vorstudienlehtgang* program for refugee students. (<http://www.amsterdamuas.com/education/practical-matters/content/studiekiezers/hva-breed/studentenzaken/language-and-preparatory-course/language-and-preparatory-course.html>).

Another example is the Foundation for Refugee Students UAF in the Netherlands which guides refugees on their study choices, during their studies and for job applications. While initially supporting them with language and develop learning skills, the UAF arranges training courses and networking meetings for refugees who are studying and graduates (<https://www.uaf.nl/english>).

Recommendation 4: HEIs could assist refugees' language training by diversifying language learning opportunities through online learning, blended learning, MOOCs, or open educational resources.

Recommendation 5: Through recognition of prior learning or different modes of provision, refugees could have smoother transition to tertiary education.

Recommendation 6: More guidance at the pre-entry level is needed; hence, open days solely for refugees where they would be informed about the Austrian HE system, regulations, language requirements, available degree programs and degree certificates could be beneficial.

Recommendation 7: Professional development or awareness programs for staff could be offered to promote social inclusion. Inclusive teaching in terms of curriculum, content delivery and assessment could be practiced.

5.3 Limitations

The research was conducted for completing a short master's thesis within one semester. Data collection has been challenging and response rate for interviews was low, which resulted in extension of the study. The researcher attributes it to variety of reasons. Firstly, it could simply be related to busy work schedule of the senior administrators and hence due to prioritization of activities, there might have been no time to be allocated for an interview. Secondly, the topic might not have been of major interest to the universities as they have to deal with other pressing issues such as open access, retention rates or funding. Thirdly, in some cases the departments that were

contacted were conducting research projects that were parallel to the topic of the current thesis hence, sharing of the projects results at the later stages were suggested.

Challenges in data collection resulted in a change in the direction of the research. The study was initially planned as a case study of two higher education institutions. Yet, difficulty in accessing all stakeholders within each institution did not render it possible to make it a case study. Hence, the direction of the research was changed into a case study of a national HE system with specific focus solely on public universities.

It is assumed that all interviewees responded with candor and results reflect genuine opinions of the participants. Due to the small sample available for the study, results may not be generalized to all refugees or HEIs in Austria. Further, not all stakeholders from the universities in cities on the migration route which have the most refugee students were able to be reached. Yet, the study could cast a light on the issues surrounding refugees' access to HE in Austria and responses of HEIs within the context of the small population of the sample, contribute to existing knowledge in the field and prepares the ground for further analyses and comparisons.

Further studies with larger samples or in-depth and micro studies would be needed to have a more insight into the experiences of refugees and institutions.

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Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions for Students

Background information

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been in Austria?
3. What is your status of immigration?
4. Were you studying before coming to the Austria?
5. Are you currently studying in Austria?
 - a. Which program?
 - b. Would you like to study in the future?

Accessing education in Austria

6. How did you find the course you're studying now?
Did you receive any information, advice or guidance about study opportunities?
7. Did you receive any help with the application process? From whom?
Did you have any problems in the application process?
8. Did you have any difficulties in accessing education?

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

9. Was/Were your previous diploma/previous studies easily accepted/recognized by the university?

Funding

10. Do you receive any funding for your courses?
11. How are you financing your studies?
12. What type of support do you need more?

General views on education and training

13. How you think access to HE for refugees and asylum seekers could be improved in Austria?
14. Is there anything else you would like to add about your educational experiences in Austria?

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions for Higher Education Institutions

Interview Questions

Institutional Policy/Strategies/Approaches

1. What are the current and future strategic plans of the university concerning inclusion of refugee students?
2. How does the university structure and facilitate access of refugee/asylum seeker students?
3. What mechanisms are there in the institution for implementation of the strategic commitment to inclusion of refugee/asylum seeker students?

Recognition of Foreign Qualifications

4. How does the institution act when refugee/asylum seeker students have missing documents/no proven evidence of qualifications?
5. How do you verify authenticity of documents? Have you experienced any cases of fraud?

Studies

6. Do you consider diversification of course and program offerings or offering different modes of provision for refugee/asylum seeker students?
7. Do you award ECTS credits for courses in the MORE program? If students later are accepted to degree programs, can the courses taken in the MORE program be transferred to degree studies?

Support&Integration

8. Does the institution have teaching and learning support systems in place to ensure student success of refugee students?
9. How does your institution act to ensure social integration of refugee/asylum seeker students?

Challenges&Suggestions

10. What do you think are the challenges faced by the institution in including refugee/asylum seeker students to higher education?
11. How do you think the Ministry/policy-makers could support higher education institutions in the short and long-run?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions for the Ministry

Interview Questions

National Policy

1. Would you please reflect on the current perspective and the strategic goals of the Ministry for inclusion of refugee/asylum seeker students to Austrian higher education system?
2. What practical measures does the Ministry take for facilitation of refugee/asylum seeking students' inclusion to Austrian higher education system?
3. What are the Ministry's future perspectives and strategies?
4. Does the Ministry plan to offer quotas/fund places specifically for refugee students at universities?
5. How does the Ministry incentivize higher education institutions to integrate more refugee and asylum seeker students?

Recognition of Foreign Qualification

6. How do you proceed with validation process of the refugee/asylum seeking students?
7. How do you verify authenticity of foreign diplomas? Have you experienced any cases of fraud?
8. How does the institution act when refugee/asylum seeker students have missing documents/no proven evidence of qualifications?
9. Are there any cases where refugee or asylum /seeker applicant has been denied from access due to substantial differences between a foreign qualification and the required national qualification? How would you guide the applicant?
10. Do you have any national guidelines for higher education institutions on how to prepare "background paper"?
11. What do you think are the challenges against establishing a common mechanism for recognition of refugee students' formal qualifications in Austria?

Challenges&Suggestions

12. What do you think are the challenges against promotion of access to higher education for refugee/asylum seeker students in Austria?
13. How do you think the EU can provide support to Member States and higher education institutions for inclusion of refugee/asylum seeker students?
14. What other measures do you think could be taken in the short and long-run by the Ministry and HE Institutions?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to add that may be useful for the purpose of this thesis?

Appendix D: Interview Code List

Interviewee code	Position
IC 201	Senior Administrator at the Ministry (BMWFW)
IC 202	Expert at the Ministry (BMWFW)
IC 203	Member of the Refugee Project
IC 204	Senior Administrator at a HEI
IC 205	Senior Administrator at a HEI
IC 206	Senior Administrator at a HEI
IC 207	Senior Administrator at a HEI
IC 208	Admission Officer at a HEI
IC 209	Admission Officer at a HEI
IC 210	Head of a Language Center at a HEI
IC 211	Expert
IC 212	Student 1
IC 213	Student 2
IC 214	Student 3
IC 215	Student 4
IC 216	Student 5/Student Union
IC 217	Member of a Student Union at a HEI
IC 218	Head of a Student Union at a HEI

Appendix E: Students' Demographic Information

Student	Sex	Age	Country	Duration of stay in Austria	Immigration Status	Education Level
1	M	27	Syria	7 months	Recognised Refugee	Bachelor Graduate
2	M	24	Syria	7 months	Recognised Refugee	7 Semesters of Bachelor Study -
3	M	22	Syria	9 months	Recognised Refugee	6 Semesters of Bachelor Study
4	M	21	Syria	1,5 years	Recognised Refugee	4,5 Semesters of Bachelor Study
5	F	29	Syria	2,5 year	Recognised Refugee	Bachelor Graduate